ULTIMATE Nintendo®

GUIDE TO THE N64 LIBRARY
1996 - 2002

PAT CONTRI

Ultra 64 Console and Controller

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Introduction

Greetings, friends!

I am Giles Goddard, a video game programmer who managed to get his dream job. Way back in 199X, I was working at a then-small company in the UK called Argonaut Software. We were the experts in 3D! We lived and loved every second of it. Well, I am sure you see this coming, but Nintendo needed us to help bring *Star Fox* for the Super Nintendo to life. While working on that game, I decided to take the plunge and become one of the first people from abroad to work at Nintendo in Kyoto, Japan. During my tenure there, I managed to knock out a few titles like the underrated *Stunt Race FX*, *1080° Snowboarding*, and *Super Mario 64*'s FACE. Yes, that's right!

Now for the history of the Nintendo 64!

Nintendo's first "proper" 3D console began life as a joint effort with Silicon Graphics, Inc. (SGI) called Project Reality in 1993. The project aimed to produce a console that could truly bring Nintendo into the 3D era with a uniquely Nintendo style. They needed to make a console that stood out from their competitors in capability and looks while still being affordable to the average household. I'm still impressed they managed to do it!

It's also very dear to my heart as I was lucky enough to work at Nintendo Co., Ltd. during this time and saw firsthand how many decisions were made during the development.

Introduction by Giles Goddard

It was an extremely exciting time for me as I had just joined the Technology Development Department in Nintendo EAD (Entertainment Analysis & Development) and got to work on many different aspects of the Nintendo 64 console itself and then several of its games.

Before the availability of Wintel PCs paired with off-the-shelf GPUs that exploded in popularity in the following years, SGI held a prestigious reputation within both the scientific and film industries for developing the most advanced graphics workstations and supercomputers. For anyone searching for the pinnacle in 3D graphics capabilities or high-end computation, SGI was the obvious choice at the time.

Sony's PlayStation, released before the Nintendo 64, opted for a different strategy with their 3D graphics, prioritizing the quantity of pixels over their quality. However, we recognized that a higher pixel count didn't necessarily translate to a better gaming experience. To achieve what Nintendo needed to make in both hardware and software, it became clear that leveraging SGI's technology would be the key. By prioritizing pixel quality from the outset, we aimed to create a console capable of delivering graphics that surpassed even those found in arcade games at the time. The challenge lay in distilling the capabilities of a $100,000 graphics workstation into a console priced at just $199. The solution? A series of tough compromises, an area where Nintendo excels, driven by their unwavering focus on the player experience.

The end result was an iconic console that, despite its developmental challenges and limitations, boasted truly unique features for its time, such as trilinear texture filtering, which gave textures a much smoother appearance than the usual jagged pixels found in games. It also used a unified memory architecture rather than separate banks of memory for audio, graphics, and code, giving developers much more freedom. Although it may not have achieved the sales numbers of the PlayStation, in true Nintendo fashion, it was successful in its own right. Its constraints inspired many developers, including me, to create truly unique and memorable games.

===

Giles Goddard is a British video game developer with over 40 years of experience dating back to the ZX Spectrum days. While at Argonaut Software, the then 19-year-old helped usher in the 3D gaming era as a programmer on Star Fox for the Super Nintendo. Giles went on to work directly for Nintendo in Japan, leading projects like Stunt Race FX and the now seminal 1080° Snowboarding. He has since gone on to found his own game studios in Kyoto. He is currently running Chuhai Labs, which has released Cursed to Golf and Whitewater Wipeout, and not one but two nods to his past snowboarding hit with Carve Snowboarding and Carve Jr. When Giles is not working, he splits his time between Kyoto and his island getaway. After all these years, his passion is still programming and snowboarding.

About the Team

Pat Contri (@patthenespunk, @contricode) is a video game player, collector, and historian best known for *Pat the NES Punk*, *Flea Market Madness*, *The Video Game Years*, and *The Completely Unnecessary Podcast*. This is his third time acting as editor-in-chief and contributor to a video game book after *Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library* and *Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the SNES Library*. He enjoys good nachos.

Kyh Yang (@kyh_yang) is a freelance writer and editor living in the Pacific Northwest. When not slouching in front of her computer, she plays real-life *Harvest Moon* and prays to the internet gods for fiber internet service. Kyh acted as both a contributor and editor for this book.

Daniel Greenberg (@winterion) is a husband, father, professor of Computer Game Design at George Mason University, guest lecturer at game conventions across North America, hockey player, root beer aficionado, and owner of Winterion Game Studios (watch.winterion.com). Daniel acted as both a contributor and editor for this book.

Daniel Anderson plays video games and then ponders them via his blogs, talks, and drawful art! His works can be found littering the Internet under the search-friendly alias Pacario – a portmanteau of his childhood heroes, Pac-Man and Super Mario. Waka waka!

John Bardinelli (@itsamejohn) is a writer and narrative designer who has been plugged into the gaming scene for over two decades. When he's not digging into ancient gaming technology or fiddling around with story designs, he's probably getting lost in the mountains, playing in the snow, or spending half an hour making the perfect cup of coffee.

Jason Breininger (@CartCorner) is a lifelong gamer and freelance video game and horror film writer. He is also a podcaster (*Press Rewind Lyrics Podcast*) whose latest herculean podcasting effort is to cover Prince's entire discography, song by song. He is also a husband, father, and wearer of hundreds of concert t-shirts.

Bill Chatzopoulos (@BillyChatz) caught the collecting bug in the 90s while trying to finish all the NES RPGs (he's a glutton for punishment). Now, he spends most of his time at a cushy desk job, being a family man and hoping his kids will also love anything retro.

Jim Evans (@SJimtendo) will never stop playing terrible games for the cheap thrills. He can be found on YouTube doing low-production cost videos about all things gaming.

Stephen Greenwell (@sgwell) is an award-winning writer and editor for the Cullen College of Engineering at the University of Houston. His previous decades as a reporter included courts, police, sports, and flippant video game reviews. He is also one-third of the *Your Parents' Basement* podcast.

Dale Kulas (@gruel) survives the brutal Midwest winters by playing too many video games and consuming an overwhelming amount of new pro-wrestling television every week while sneaking in a variety of cardio and yoga workouts.

Jonathan Moore is a Senior Researcher for the Oklahoma Department of Human Services by day, husband and father by day and night, and enjoys watching sports and playing video games whenever possible.

Dagan Moriarty is a professional animator and cybernetically enhanced princess-rescuing ninja residing in Philadelphia. He wishes the 16-bit console generation never had to end, but what can ya do? He is cohost of Last Stand Media's *KnockBack* and *Constellation* podcasts.

Karen Niemla is among the "*Oregon Trail Generation*" and enjoys retro consoles and computers, PC gaming, drawing, writing, and cats. Currently, she is a Reference and Technology Librarian at Mercyhurst University.

Cole Penton (@rodianhobo) is an English language development teacher who enjoys using popular culture, particularly video games, as an avenue for exploring how and why language evolves in modern contexts. He also likes writing/illustrating comics and watching movies with his wife.

Chris Pranger (@TheChrisPranger) is a senior writer at a marketing company and a former localization writer/editor for Nintendo of America. He likes cats and Dr. Pepper and hopes to someday become king of the pirates.

Rowan Ryder-McNyland is a game designer and writer and has been playing games for as long as he can remember. Growing up in the Australian rural town of Armidale meant that his two forms of entertainment were the single cinema and video games, both of which he engrossed himself with as much as possible.

Keith M. Scheessele is a mental health professional residing in Las Vegas, Nevada, with his wife, Stephanie, and daughter, Hope. He's a Vegas Golden Knights season ticket holder and never says no to a cold beer and new shoot 'em up.

Nick Tricome (@itssnick) is a Philadelphia-based journalist who has covered sports and gaming for various outlets. He is also an avid hockey fan built upon countless hours spent with *Ice Hockey*, *Blades of Steel*, and EA's NHL series.

Mike Vito's (@VeryEvilAsh) goal in life is to play every video game known to man. His wife and daughter constantly try to convince him that it's not possible, but he loves games too much to give up so easily. When he's not playing games, he's writing about them at HeyPoorPlayer.com.

Chris Williams (@cwilliamsactor) is an actor, audiobook narrator, award-winning author and editor, LARPer, convention runner, and all-around nerd residing in the Washington, D.C. suburbs. He is also known to talk people's ears off about history, literature, and why *Werewolf: The Last Warrior* is an underrated classic.

Key to the Guide

Each entry in the main N64 review section consists of those game cartridges commercially released in Japan, North America, Europe, and other regions between 1996-2002. Special and non-commercial cartridges are compiled in separate sections.

Each individual game listing contains the following:

Game Title – The game's name, with alternate ones listed for specific regions and countries.

Genre – The classification or type of game, for example, a platformer, racing, or sports. Many games are a combination of two genres or span multiple ones.

Release Date – The approximate date the game first became commercially available in North America (NA) if the game was released there. Otherwise, if it is not an NA title, the default date is for the specific region of either PAL (Europe and Australia) or Japan (JP), unless otherwise listed.

Region – The region in which the game was released: NA (North America), PAL (PAL territories including Europe and Australia), JP (Japan), BRA (Brazil only), AUS (Australia only), etc.

Developer – The company responsible for the creation of the game: programming, art, sound design, music, etc.

Ported by – If a game was originally created for the arcade, computer, or another game console, this is the company responsible for programming/translating it for the N64, if different from the original developer.

Publisher – The company responsible for financing the development, advertising/marketing, and releasing the game. A publisher may develop a game internally with their own team but may also hire another company to handle development.

Players – The number of players for whom the game is designed. By default, it will denote a multiplayer game with alternating turns. However, "(simultaneous)" denotes a game that can be played or controlled by more than one player at the same time.

Features – Game attributes, including Game Pak Save (saving game progress to the cartridge), Controller Pack Save (saving to an external memory pack), Password Save (being able to save via password), Rumble Pak support, Expansion Pak support, Transfer Pak support, and special controller support.

Availability – The prevalence and relative popularity of a game during the lifespan of the N64, ranging from very common to very rare. The default availability is the NA (North America) market or whichever version of the game is depicted. Note: This does not necessarily relate to the game's availability in modern times.

Japanese Required – This is the Japanese language fluency required to play competently, rated Low, Medium, or High for games released only in Japan.

Star Rating – The reviewer's overall appraisal of the game, pertaining to its quality relative to other similar historical games in the genre, related games in the N64 library, and other factors.

☆ – **Poor:**
Fundamental issues and barely playable. No merit at all.

☆ – **Very Bad**
Very troubled with many issues, but still playable. Very little merit.

☆☆ – **Bad**
Problematic but still playable. Little merit.

☆☆ – **Below Average**
More negative attributes than positive. Some merit.

☆☆☆ – **Average**
Mediocre, with some fun elements, but not a standout experience.

☆☆☆ – **Above Average**
Enjoyable, with more positive attributes than negative.

☆☆☆☆ – **Good**
Enjoyable with some shortcomings.

☆☆☆☆ – **Very Good**
Fun and enjoyable, with a few flaws.

☆☆☆☆☆ – **Excellent**
Outstanding, with very minor flaws.

☆☆☆☆☆ – **Classic**
Closest to perfection in both concept and execution.

A note about Nintendo 64 cartridge images:

Variant cartridge images are displayed on their respective game pages, including region variants, revisions, "Players Choice Million Seller" re-releases, and more. While not exhaustive for every title, these examples show the variety of unique cartridges in the N64 library.

1080° Snowboarding

Genre: Sports, Racing
Release Date: Apr. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆

Grab a snowboard and hit the slopes in this third- and first-person perspective downhill racer! Players glide across six snow-filled courses, from the gentle slope of Crystal Lake with the body of water in the background to Mountain Village with its tunnels, grassy patches, and cars to avoid. The courses can come in various weather conditions and times of the day. Each of the five playable characters (plus three unlockable) has a set of stats that gives them strengths and weaknesses on the slopes. Ricky Winterborn, for example, has great jump and technique, making him ideal for performing tricks, but his low-speed score does not do any favors in races. Certain characters are also more forgiving to control, and there is a training mode for a bit of practice. Eight different Lamar-licensed boards (plus one unlockable) are available with individual acceleration and control attributes. The controls are straightforward, but it may take some time to get used to them. When airborne, use the Control Stick to angle the board to be parallel to the ground when landing; otherwise, it is a spill, which adds to the damage meter (ending the race and costing a board/life when filled). It takes several races to figure out when and where to accelerate and properly make tight turns. It is a process that comes with many wipeouts, which causes the characters to grunt and exclaim. Still, the gameplay is smooth, and character movements are very fluid and responsive, so it is a comfortable learning curve. Match Race consists of a series of one-on-one races against CPU-controlled opponents. Reach the finish line first to carry on to the next of four to six courses (depending on difficulty). Time Attack records the fastest time on a single course. Trick Attack leverages the stunts system, where performing various spins and grabs earns points, the goal being to rack up as many as possible with each run. Contest mode is a series of slaloms (to weave between flags for points and extra time) and special courses (for tricks to get a high score). Finally, 2P VS is a straightforward split-screen race against a friend. This racer is a strong option for a snowboarding fix with smooth gameplay, a good variety of modes, and high-energy music to keep shredding the slopes.

Reflections: *1080° Snowboarding* was destined to be memorable, with the likes of Shigeru Miyamoto producing and Giles Goddard (the programmer responsible for Mario's head gracing the *Super Mario 64* title screen) working on it. Trick Attack became my favorite mode; I couldn't help but say "one more" after each run. I always felt like I could put up a better score, plus I was having a lot of fun making attempts. *1080°* is a graphical powerhouse. Snow sprays up when you make a sharp turn, your board leaves a trail behind you, you can see your character's reflection when they glide across the ice, and the courses seem to slope downwards forever. Better still, the frame rate stays consistent throughout, so the game always feels as good as it looks. – NT

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

64 de Hakken!! Tamagotchi: Minna de Tamagotchi World

[Found on 64!! Tamagotchi: Everyone's Tamagotchi World]
Genre: Action, Board Game
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: A.I., Hudson Soft
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Availability: Common
Features: None
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆

Raise a pet alien against friends or computer players in this sometimes fun but often confusing board game. Each player begins a session by selecting an egg that comes in five different pastel colors and the option for a checkerboard pattern. Players take turns rolling a six-sided die, working through space outcomes, and interacting with their aliens in order to increase their power meter through multiple iterations and evolve their tiny alien blobs into adult Tamagotchi – the first player to raise their alien to maturity without running out of credits wins. Player icons on the board are represented by Tamagotchi devices with colors that correspond to each player's egg. Instead of displaying a pixelated alien, the icons show a number of credits that start at 64. The player icons and game board take up the bottom half of the screen, while the top half is a constant view of a brightly-colored room that houses the eggs, along with meters that display the hunger, energy, and power meters of each unborn alien. Players advance along the board and land on spaces that will affect their egg (which hatches into an alien after the first turn) in a multitude of possible ways. Spaces with a plus or minus symbol increase or decrease the power meter, while those with symbols such as bats, slot machines, or dumbbells cause a one-player mini-game to occur, the results of which alter alien meters or the player's credit count. Dedicated mini-game spaces allow for two or four-player games that increase the winner's power meter. After the space's outcome is cleared, the player will have the opportunity to spend credits to feed or exercise their alien, further increasing or decreasing its power depending on factors such as its enjoyment of the food or how well its workout goes. While the alien-raising idea is an interesting concept that works well when it gets time to shine, an overabundance of space types, extreme visual clutter, and nonsensical mini-games are unfortunately too ingrained in the overall experience for a truly fun competition to occur.

Reflections: I love the offbeat, deceptively simple art style that defines the Tamagotchi franchise, so it was disappointing to find that it was so misused in *Found on 64!! Tamagotchi: Everyone's Tamagotchi World*. All of the charming alien designs are present, but the board that takes up the vast majority of playtime is overdesigned to the point of incoherency at times. This visual mishmash is complemented by gameplay that could have been good if the developers had practiced restraint. The unending barrage of oversaturated graphic design and bizarre gameplay elements ensure that the time spent raising an alien will mostly be an exercise in patience rather than parental bliss. – CP

64 Hanafuda: Tenshi no Yakusoku

[64 Hanafuda: Angel's Promise]
Genre: Card Game
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Altron
Publisher: Altron
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆

As a young man in Japan, the player searches for the spot they had promised to meet someone many years ago. One by one, they encounter strangers in digitized photographic stills of various locations. These people, presented as bright cartoon images in the background, hold bits of information. But first, the player must defeat them in hanafuda, played in a top-down, 2D view of the cards over the location's background. Hanafuda is a traditional Japanese set of 48 floral-themed cards split across 12 suits based on the months. Matches occur with other cards within a suit, and some of the four cards of each suit contain symbols that can combine with others for points. Each stage of the story mode cycles through the three games available: Koi-Koi, Hana Awase, and Oicho-Kabu. For Koi-Koi and Hana Awase, aim to get the best hand through the matches made (symbol combinations have varying worth). Oicho-Kabu is a game of betting on up to four hands at once to beat the dealer's hand. In this case, symbols mean nothing, and the card's value comes from its suit. Following a short dialogue with opponents, the ruleset for the game is revealed, such as the number of rounds, win condition, and time limit. As the stages progress, those options become more limiting, creating a semblance of difficulty in these games of strategy and chance. Before play begins, each person picks a random card to determine who goes first (or starts as the dealer for Oicho-Kabu). If the player loses the round, the opponents gloat, and there is the option to retry. After the eighth set of opponents, there is an ending scene where the young man finally reunites with their special someone. Besides the story mode, there is also the option to play a singular free match where the player can select characters from the story mode cast and determine the rules for the specific game chosen. While not explicitly terrible, the character graphics could be more professional with odd proportions and facial feature placements. However, the individual games themselves are enjoyable and highly addicting, and with a simple reference chart (like in the manual), even someone without hanafuda experience can jump into the action.

Reflections: Nearly 100 years before the Famicom and NES, Nintendo was founded as a company in 1889 producing hanafuda cards. Seeing how hanafuda games are more casual and low-stakes than other traditional Japanese games (mahjong and shogi), I'm not surprised that they don't have the same presence in video games. There were only a handful of hanafuda games on the Super Famicom, and *64 Hanafuda* is the only N64 entry. I wasn't familiar with all the games in this title, but I loved learning them and getting into the strategy! I grew up playing hwatu (the Korean name for hanafuda), so these cards have a special place in my heart. – KY

64 Ōzumō

[64 Professional Sumo Wrestling]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Bottom Up
Publisher: Bottom Up
Players: 1-4 (2 simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

Slap on a mawashi and jump into an authentic yet adorable polygonal rendition of Japan's national sport: sumo. While moving about freely in the 3D circular ring (dohyō), observe the action from a side-view perspective. Utilize the analog stick and different C-button combinations to attempt a series of wrestling-like moves ranging from simple slaps to surprisingly complex throws, all to either eject the opponent from the dohyō or unceremoniously upend them. Matches are short, lasting only a few seconds (just like in real sumo), and the action is slow. The crowd noise and the play-by-play ringside voice make it all feel important. Game modes are in no short supply. Neophytes should start in Practice Mode, which does a good job of getting players up to speed quickly. There are options for a single fight, tournament, or career-oriented Yokozuna Success Mode. The Yokozuna route is a simulation mode spanning two calendar years, featuring 12 15-day tournaments to claim sumo's top prize. After commanding one of more than forty unique fighters in combat, there is still work to improve the wrestler. A series of mini-games include fishing, eating, and hopping on a trampoline to increase Mind, Body, or Technique stats to get fight-ready. Also, monitor the rikishi's diet to ensure they are beefy enough to hold their own in the ring. Outside of matches, romantic interests are available, though they do not affect the player's performance in the ring. There is also the opportunity to further rumble in Antarctica, Egypt, and on the moon. A one-on-one battle mode is available against another player or CPU; up to four can participate in a sumo tournament. Ultimately, there is no shortage of creativity in training and playing the wrestler, but the novelty is fleeting; one run through Yokozuna Success Mode is sufficient to see all there is. Without others for multiplayer fun, the solo experience will not entertain sumo fans for long.

Reflections: Despite its focus on a sport barely known in the West, *64 Ōzumō* (which had a limited edition that included a Controller Pak) could have had a life stateside. It's pretty to look at and easy to learn, even with a language barrier. There's a healthy variety of fighters, and pulling off moves is always satisfying. Granted, you won't be throwing a Hadōken or anything over-the-top like that, but winning matches against my wife and neighbors was as gratifying as any victory in a smoky bowling alley arcade. The Nintendo 64 library features a racing game with only Volkswagen Beetles. If that worked, surely we had room for a sumo game in North America. – KS

64 Ōzumō 2

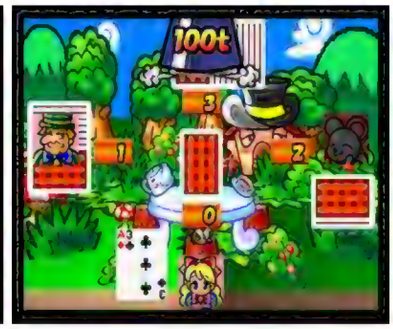
[64 Professional Sumo Wrestling 2]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Bottom Up
Publisher: Bottom Up
Players: 1-4 (2 simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

Step back into the dohyō in this second sumo title for the N64. In sumo, combatants must force their opponent to the ground or out of the ring. When active in combat, the view is to the competitors' side, as if sitting in a front-row seat to the festivities. Characters are cartoonish, and the exaggerated facial expressions of the wrestlers are sure to induce chuckles. A ringside announcer calls the action, making every interaction with a competitor feel a little more important. The matches are brief, often around a minute in length; achieve victory by combining liberal use of the analog stick with C-button presses of varying complexity. From a simple slap to a bell hammer backward body drop, the move list is surprisingly robust. Elementary moves like the aforementioned open-hand slap or a blow to the chest will only get players so far. Learning how to predict and counter the opponent's attacks to win tournaments is critical. Anticipate effectively to deal greater damage; guess wrong, and players leave themselves more vulnerable to attacks. A simple Match mode lets players get right to competing, while Practice mode offers a chance to master the controls. The Story mode involves competing in hundreds of events across five years. The extensive length allows for error earlier, but grinding can run stale before achieving champion status as the challenge increases. When in town for tournaments, various mini-games help hone these skills – for example, lifting weights by rapidly tapping a succession of buttons to improving flexibility by gingerly moving the Control Stick while the character stretches. Amorous pursuits can also help in developing into a better wrestler. Whether it's Kakihara, a doctor at the Tokyo Hospital, or Sakurai, an elementary school teacher, developing these relationships can provide tips that aid in climbing the sumo ladder. A deep wrestler creator is available. The character's physical attributes are alterable, allowing players to balance power, stamina, speed, popularity, and technique differently. Ultimately, the ability to create a wrestler and a long career mode are nice touches. With the variety of gameplay and customization options available, it's clear that the developers went to great lengths to craft an immersive sumo experience. That said, players not already sumo fans may tire early of the extensive options provided. There is much to do, but some players may simply want to wrestle. For that group, grabbing three friends and jumping into a custom Cup tournament is probably the way to go. For gamers hungering to experience the journey of ascending to the heights of the sumo trade while falling in love, this sequel is a generous second helping of both.

Reflections: Bottom Up put together one of the most eclectic collections of any video game developer. They explored sumo, not once but twice, while dipping their toes into mahjong, golf, and billiards. They even took a crack at developing a Pokémon clone in 1999. You'll find some of their other work in the pages of this book, but for those interested in exploring titles outside of the Nintendo 64 universe, look for Bottom Up games on consoles from the Game Boy Color to the PlayStation. – KS

64 Trump Collection: Alice No Waku Waku Trump World

[64 Trump Collection: Alice's Exciting Trump World]
Genre: Card Game
Release Date: Aug.1998
Region: JP
Developer: Bottom Up
Publisher: Bottom Up
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

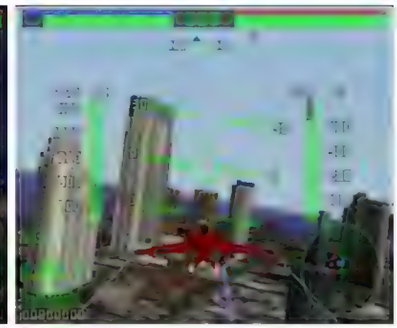


In this bizarre mashup of a children's tale and parlor den gambler, Alice is trapped in Wonderland and must win eight different card games to gain her freedom. The main Story mode is presented as a bright cartoon pop-up book where each stage is a new page. The Cheshire Cat, White Rabbit, and playing-card guards all make an appearance, each with their own games, ranging from simple memory matching to a version of Old Maid (putting down cards in order, faster than the opponent). Each stage plays out from a top-down 2D perspective of the games and has its own win criteria, such as needing to lose all the cards first, forcing an opponent to run out of lives, or staying in the top two in a three-set. The most enjoyable card game pits the player against three AI opponents, where the aim is to get rid of the hand first. The round starts by choosing a random number. Each player puts down as many cards of that number as they have (up to four), all face down. Players can bluff, so if they put down four cards and state they are all the number nine, an opponent can challenge them. If the player is found to be lying, they have to pick up double the amount originally placed. There is a second mode where each game from Story is available (often with up to four players) using tweaked rules, like upping the score needed to win or changing the overall number of rounds. There are also six mini-games to try, ranging from solitaire to blackjack slots and electronic poker. It is surprisingly good fun for what essentially boils down to card games readily available elsewhere. The Wonderland aesthetic turns what would otherwise be lackluster into something more interesting. With just enough games, mini-games, and visual punch to entertain, this casual diversion will keep players going down the rabbit hole.

Reflections: Given the general atmosphere of whimsy, 64 Trump Collection could have been a Paper Mario-style adventure starring characters from Wonderland. Instead, it's Alice in a card game gambling world, which I find bizarre. It's still quite a fun title that doesn't wear out its welcome, though, as many card games tend to do. The games are varied enough to make you want to see what's coming up, and when you do check out the next card game, it's simple enough that you can immediately start enjoying it, even without fully understanding the rules. The whole Alice in Wonderland theme still bugs me, but it's hard to argue with an entertaining game. – JE

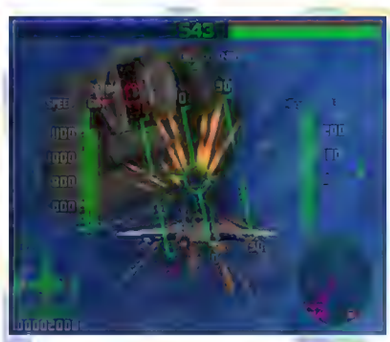
AeroFighters Assault

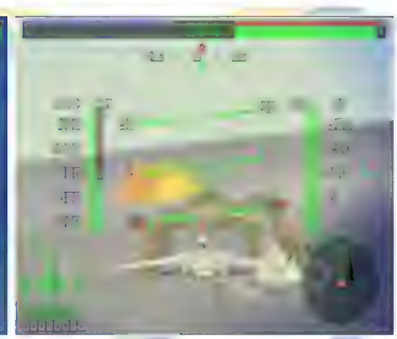
Sonic Wings Assault (JP)
Genre: Flight Combat
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Paradigm Entertainment
Publisher: Video System
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

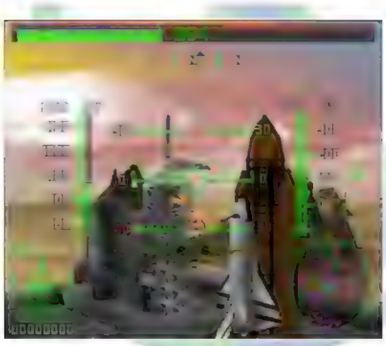


Earth needs help defeating the futuristic terrorist group Phutta Morgana in this 3D action-oriented plane-flying simulation. Commanding one of four jets from a third-person perspective across 10 levels, face enemies attacking from air, ground, and sea, often simultaneously. Use the analog stick and shoulder buttons to maneuver around the battlefield, Z for the main gun, A for guided weapons, and the C-buttons for braking and yaw actions. Each aircraft is equipped with a unique special attack that can only be used twice per stage, unleashed by hitting combinations of buttons that vary per craft. The F-14, for example, has a Rudder Reversal activated by flying at 400 knots, tilting the nose 30 degrees, then hitting C-left or C-right twice. Whether traversing the skies above Tokyo or avoiding being blasted into the Pacific Ocean, the visuals are bland and forgettable. The absence of artistry is most evident when reaching boss battles, which are so flat and dull that they are uninteresting despite their massive size. Winning these fights is an exercise in repetitive shooting and dodging with little variation, and the prize is nothing but another dreadfully slow stage to fly through. Similarly, the music is flavorless, and while the banter between pilots is interesting, it becomes tiresome by the time the first boss is dusted. For a bit of practice honing aviation skills, there is a mode flying through rings for points and Boss Attack, where players can refine strategies against the Main Game bosses. There is a tremendous amount of fun to be had challenging a friend to dogfights in two-player mode. Fights are brief but intense, and it is so much more satisfying to unleash an arsenal against a live opponent. Ultimately, this has the inner makings of a winner, as it is a fine flight simulator with some interesting action. It fails to do anything more than the bare basics, though, and it does not do those with much flair.

Reflections: Before filing for bankruptcy in 2001, Video System published some true classics of the shooter genre, most notably the first few games in the AeroFighters series. Those titles featured gameplay that checks all the boxes for any vertically-scrolling shooter enthusiast. Fortunately, those games have found a second life on modern consoles across multiple platforms and can be downloaded for next to nothing. *AeroFighters Assault* was the first and only game in the series to shift into 3D. It didn't make the transition all that well, and Video System went out of business not long after. – KS







European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Sonic Wings Assault

AeroGauge

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Apr. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Locomotive
Publisher: ASCII
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

In this futuristic 3D third-person racer, professional touring takes to the stratosphere. Drivers pilot special Aeromachines capable of both defying gravity and reaching exhilarating speeds. The best of these daredevils compete in the elite Sky Step Class, a Grand Prix circuit of six unwieldy tracks that span the breadth of Asia, from the neon streets of a Hong Kong knock-off to Canyon Rush, a sandy landscape designed to jostle riders through disorienting pipes and tunnels. Flight is the greatest gimmick; each of the five available vehicles (plus five unlockable ones) can leave the track at any time, moving freely through the air like leaves on a breezy day. In true flight piloting fashion, inputs are reversed – pulling back on the Control Stick casts the aircraft higher, while nudging upward sends it nose-diving. Unfortunately, this freedom has limits: vehicles are still confined to often claustrophobic courses in which flying high or laying low provides little advantage beyond dodging obstacles and avoiding damage. Instead, races are really about speed – acceleration is king, braking means losing – and this is where the mechanics backfire. An especially fickle "drift dash" maneuver is necessary to maintain a winning velocity while swerving and turning. If performed correctly, the chosen craft enjoys a short boost of speed. However, drivers can easily either fumble the timing or outright oversteer, thus throwing the race to their impeccable AI-driven competition. This mechanic makes winning on even the easiest difficulty an agonizing chore and sadly undermines the best attributes – decent graphics, audio, course design, plus some fun two-player support. The drifting issues, the scant number of tracks, and the bland, faceless cast (less so in the surprisingly elaborate manual) may relegate this experience to a "weekend rental" – a quick pit stop, perhaps, before veering down a better path.

Reflections: What defines the Nintendo 64? Most would say the 3D platformer, thanks to the likes of *Super Mario 64*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, and numerous others. But one could claim the system's real mainstay is actually racing. This is the genre of dozens of titles in the N64 library, from motocross and Mario Kart clones to wild watercraft diversions. Other racing titles take to the future, exploring realities often built on equal parts speed and shiny whimsy. Games like *F-Zero X* got this balance right, shifting delicately between grit and pulpy charm. Still, *AeroGauge*, despite its freewheeling, free-flying promise, never really takes off – both figuratively and otherwise. – DA

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

AI Shōgi 3

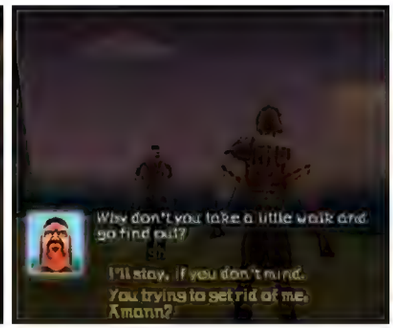
Genre: Board Game
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: ASCII Something Good
Publisher: ASCII Entertainment Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

Shōgi is a traditional wargame like chess, distinguished by an ability to deploy captured enemy forces. This top-down perspective experience simulates the board game clearly and accurately. Players maneuver their retinue of units – king, rook, bishop, gold and silver generals, knights, lances, and pawns – attempting to get promoted and eliminate enemy forces. If a player's piece enters the starting area of their opponent, it is promoted, increasing its movement abilities, with the exception of generals and kings. Captured pieces can be "dropped" onto the board in lieu of normal movement, including putting a king into check, so knowing when and how to shift the battlefield by reinforcing it is a valuable skill to develop. The main menu offers to start a new game, adjust settings, or load one of five player-saved games. The settings menu includes a choice of one of 20 backgrounds, showing the last move, toggling sound and voice, and an indicator for legal movements for pieces, which is extremely useful for newer players. Games can be played against a second human opponent or an AI opponent of six increasing difficulties. An undo feature lets the player step back to previous turns, allowing games to become learning experiences or simply correcting an erroneous move. A board editor allows players to configure the shōgi board before playing, repositioning or removing pieces as desired, to practice scenarios. Eight handicap settings allow one player to begin with fewer units, adding challenge or balancing opposition. There is no music, but simple sounds and movement announcements keep the experience from being completely silent. Additional board or piece options would have been nice. Still, as a way to play shōgi on the system, this serves amicably as a learning tool for newer players and a challenging opponent for veterans of the shōgi battlefield.

Reflections: *AI Shōgi 3* advertises itself as a game for both newcomers and experts; this is thanks in part to variant AI difficulties that Hiroshi Yamashita includes courtesy of his Yamashita Shōgi System ("YSS"). This AI would go on to win gold at the 8th Computer Olympiad in 2003. The other key name in this title is Yamato Takahashi, advertised on the cover and the perfect choice to announce moves. She studied under 9-dan and two-time Ōshō champion Yoshimasa Saeki, wrote texts on strategies for play, and continued to teach shōgi lessons for years after leaving the professional ranks. – DG

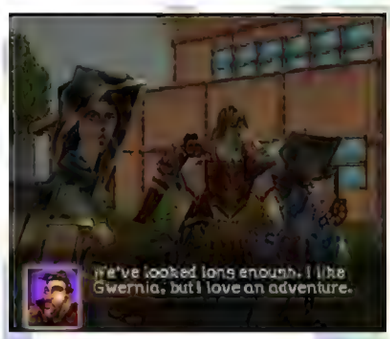
Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage

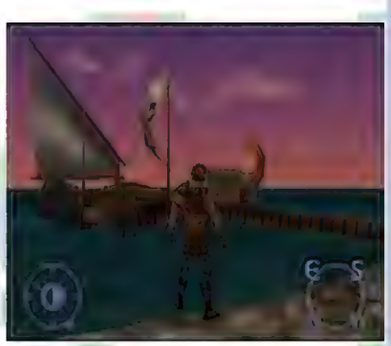
Genre: RPG
Release Date: Mar. 2001
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: H20 Entertainment
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆



Poisoned trainee knight Alaron travels the world to find an antidote while uncovering his secret past. This third-person RPG takes place in a continuously expansive 3D world where he slowly jogs around in search of towns, enemies, and treasure. Everything he does, inside and outside of battle, depends on stats, spells, and skill levels. Players can exchange experience points to increase any of these, and new characters come with a few skills and spells of their own. There are 13 characters to recruit into the party of four, and party members are freely changeable, although jettisoned characters sometimes vanish. Low HP negatively affects actions, and death is permanent, so it is imperative to heal often. The towns, forests, mountains, and seas are complemented by a circadian cycle, fluctuating weather, chests, and secret areas. The map and compass help exploration, while camping or saving can occur almost anywhere. Strangely, towns and indoor locations are often complex and difficult to navigate, enough to require an on-screen mini-map, and merchants that sell items and skills are located haphazardly. Enemies like minotaurs, zombies, wyverns, and bandits roam the land, and the party may either sneak past them or fight. In combat, the scene changes to a battlefield where members use potions, weapons, or spells and take turns moving within a limited radius. Weapons differ in strength and accuracy, and ranged attacks and certain spells can strike distant opponents. Armors similarly vary in protection and dexterity scores. With so much walking out on the field, even boss fights, which are infrequent and resemble regular encounters, feel protracted. While the story is structurally unique, it is confusing, the visuals are unappealing and dim (an Expansion Pak increases resolution but improves little), and the music is anemic. Neither great nor terrible, the quality hinges upon some patience and appetite for RPGs.

Reflections: I've played many RPGs on screen and paper, so it feels good to play a novel one. In *Aidyn Chronicles*, healing is a skill that succeeds or fails rather than magic you just use, intelligence influences aim in battle, and your characters' stamina influences their general efficacy. I enjoyed learning the system and respected the atypical story (although I did not really like it). However, the glacial pace is its fatal flaw, burying its merits in the mud. That's the primary complaint of people who count this game among the worst games they've ever played, yet there are others who love it. Ultimately, I'm glad I played it, but I probably won't revisit it. – KN



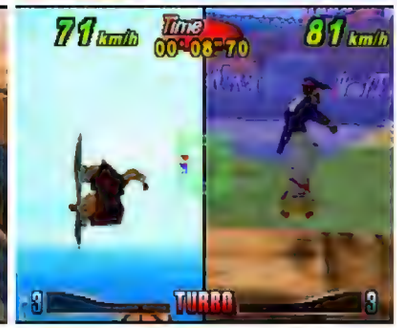


European Cartridge

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Air Boarder 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, PAL
Developer: Human Entertainment
Publisher: GAGA Communications (PAL), Human Entertainment (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆



In 2064, skateboards are a thing of the distant past, replaced with hoverboards flying across the sea and up walls. Players control one of four air boarders (with more unlockable) in this third-person 3D sports title, flying and tricking across three modes in pursuit of a high score. Street Work tasks the player to gain points within a strict time limit, which is done by performing and executing various tricks before landing, resulting in a bigger score. Passing through checkpoints scattered around the level earns more time. In theory, this encourages performing tricks on the go, but in practice, it is easier to repeat a set of tricks in one area and then skate through the checkpoints after attaining a high score. The other modes are even less involved: Time Attack has checkpoints, no tricks needed, and Coin mode is about collecting hundreds of coins within a generous time limit. A split-screen co-op mode runs well, though it quickly devolves into the same routine of tricks that plague the main mode. The controls are also a bit of a nuisance to get used to: characters drift along haphazardly, cornering is imprecise, and performing tricks is slow and awkward, even after spending hours playing. After memorizing a set of tricks, earning high scores goes from feeling impossible to being effortless. At this point, there are no new challenges or reasons to mix up strategy. All the characters play almost the same, too, though new boards make movement feel slightly less of a chore. Unlocking those boards means playing through most of the experience, though, and it is unlikely that interest stays long enough to see those small extras.

Reflections: *Air Boarder 64* was once considered for a North American release, but the plan was scrapped. I assume this was because it was thought that nobody in the region really wanted it. However, there are worthwhile ideas in the game. They are just tough to find underneath all of their faults. I do like how Street Work mode is structured: it forces you to move around the map, performing tricks along the way, rewarding you for different stunts in different environments. It doesn't make up for samey characters, rough voice acting, a lack of interesting goals, and an abusable trick system. Sorry, *Air Boarder 64*. In a parallel universe, maybe you're the world's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. – RR

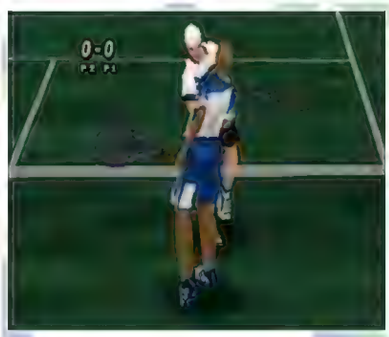
Japanese Cartridge

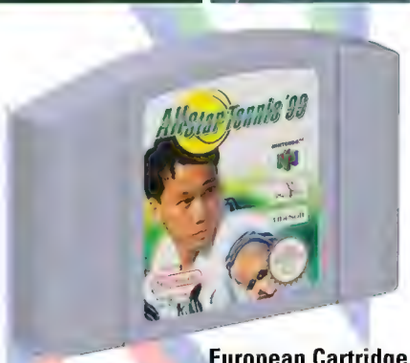
All Star Tennis '99

Yannick Noah All Star Tennis '99 (FRA)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Smart Dog
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

Crowd-pleasing rallies await in this tennis simulation that serves up both singles and doubles action. The roster consists of 12 players – eight real-world tennis professionals and four fictional players. Games play out from an overhead television-style perspective with four camera options to zoom out further. Standard tennis rules apply, but the number of sets required to win is customizable for quicker sessions. Players have a variety of ways to attack the net with pressure-sensitive soft and hard tennis shots along with lobs to fend off opponents playing a close net game. Optional special moves are available that require a tricky button sequence to execute. For example, a super shot is accomplished by holding the R + Z buttons and then pressing C-up and C-down simultaneously. This move requires incredible precision to perform during play, but it results in a satisfying animated shot, complete with neon-green graphical flourishes. There are three primary modes: Smash Tennis sets up standard singles and doubles games for up to four players, while Bomb Tennis makes bombs appear whenever a ball bounces off the court. The resulting explosion costs players points should they venture into the blast radius. World Tour sends the player around the world to vanquish the other 11 players on the roster to become world champion. The eight global courts feature diverse background scenery and their own visual flavor of grass and clay surfaces. The core tennis action suffers from baffling hit detection – balls consistently breeze by despite player characters being positioned right under them, and characters often attempt diving leaps even when the ball is coming right at their face. On the plus side, players receive sporadic cries of support from the crowd, who are promptly scolded by the umpire. The action falls just short of being an average tennis experience, as the troublesome controls have a steep learning curve that will try players' patience, and bizarre hit detection often seals the deal.

Reflections: The outlandish special moves and Bomb Tennis mode had me cracking up at their unnecessary implementation in this by-the-numbers tennis sim. *Mario Tennis* is where most people go for over-the-top tennis, so to see that here, with real-life tennis stars on the roster, was hilarious. Publisher Ubi Soft is based out of France and presumably had close ties to residing French tennis pro Yannick Noah because they made him an exclusive character in the French version, going so far as to rebrand it *Yannick Noah All Star Tennis '99*. It's a different name but has the same clunky controls and bomb explosions as before. – DK





European Cartridge

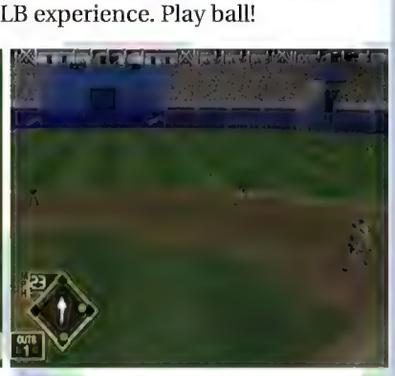
French Cartridge
Yannick Noah All Star Tennis '99

All-Star Baseball 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

The N64's only exclusive annual MLB-licensed simulation returns as a direct follow-up to *All-Star Baseball 99*. Captain updated rosters in exhibition games, a season (including stat tracking), or the playoffs. Players view at-bats from behind home plate, pitchers aim where they want the ball to go, and batters must swing directly on the ball as it crosses the plate to make contact. Batting physics is very realistic, with the trajectory of batted balls varying depending on the timing and location of the swing. The core batting and pitching experiences have a few interesting features, including a 3D Batting system that gives control over the angle of swings and visualization that depicts how batters were pitched to in their previous at-bat. Defensive AI is at a challenging level, although the poor baserunning is disappointing. Opposing teams are discerning about trades they accept during a season, but overriding their opposition is an option (which forces an acknowledgment of fleecing rivals). Utilizing the Expansion Pak smooths out animations, upgrades the character models, and adds significant detail to the rest of the visuals. Batting stances and pitcher deliveries are pleasantly accurate, with particular attention to batters with unorthodox stances like Chuck Knoblauch and Gary Sheffield. Stadiums are also surprisingly detailed, with individualized features reflecting their period appearance (such as the Padres' "Trevor Time" sign celebrating the superb Trevor Hoffman). There are multiplayer options where up to four people can play co-op on the same team or competitively. The excellent level of visual detail and slight gameplay boost combine to take a fun but flawed baseball simulator and knock it up to a very good approximation of an authentic MLB experience. Play ball!

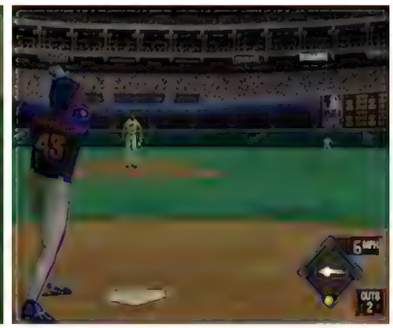
Reflections: Playing annual updates of sports games since the SNES/Genesis era has given me a bit of perspective on what you can typically expect from each installment (i.e., pretty much just roster updates). *All-Star Baseball 2000* does so much more than that, delivering exactly what I am looking for in an annual update. Iguana aggressively tackled the graphical shortcomings of the predecessor and added enough new gameplay features and AI fixes to deliver a new entry worth the full admission price. Typically, these annual updates are the last ones players desire for their collections. *All-Star Baseball 2000* is a delight for baseball fans and is still worth revisiting or experiencing for the first time. – JM



European Cartridge

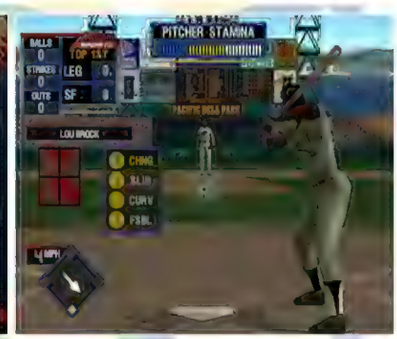
All-Star Baseball 2001

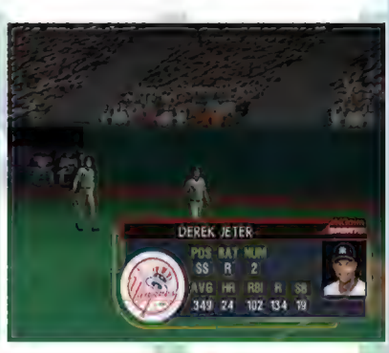
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: High Voltage Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



The All-Star Baseball series returns with its third and final entry on the N64. This MLB-licensed title provides updated rosters for all 30 franchises (plus a team of baseball's all-time greats) for use in Exhibition games, Season mode, and Playoffs. The viewpoint sits behind home plate for both sides of at-bats, with a three-quarters perspective of the fielders following contact. Batting features pitchers aiming in or out of the strike zone, while the batter must swing in the right location and at the right time to drive a hit. A box to the right displays hot and cold zones for the batter, which change throughout a game to reflect their performance. There are two main modes for MLB Play, each of which drastically alters the physics and feel. The wild Arcade equips pitchers with blazing fastballs and tricky pitches that curve far more than they could realistically, while batters crush unnaturally towering blasts if they are fortunate enough to make contact. Unfortunately, the action here is not exciting enough to hold much attention, but it can pleasantly distract for a few occasional innings. By contrast, Simulation features batting and pitching physics that are much more authentic. Poor baserunning AI detracts somewhat from the excellent pitching and batting, but not enough to seriously damage an otherwise delightful experience. A variety of batting stances are captured surprisingly well with the 3D models, particularly for players with unorthodox stances. The Yankees' John Sterling and Michael Kay serve as the announce team, but Kay has a minor role here, which gives the Sterling-dominated commentary a one-note feel. Between games, there is energetic rock music during the menus while players make choices such as the lineup, what team/players to control, and whether or not they want to simulate the next game. For a multiplayer experience, human players can substitute for AI-controlled teams at the start of any game and choose to control the same team or even split the same player on offense/defense. With all the options and choices at the player's gloved fingertips, the finale of the N64's All-Star Baseball trilogy rides an excellent batting and pitching engine to an enjoyable simulation experience.

Reflections: I was admittedly expecting the worst from *All-Star Baseball 2001*. High Voltage Software took over the series in a gap year while Iguana Entertainment focused on *All-Star Baseball 2002* for GameCube and PlayStation 2. The new developers could have taken a bigger swing with their design decisions but probably made the right call by not tinkering much with the underlying (and very good) gameplay mechanics, focusing instead on minor quality-of-life additions. Despite the quality game they brought about, I wanted so much more from *All-Star Baseball 2001* following the significant jump in quality from *99* to *2000*. – JM





All-Star Baseball 99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

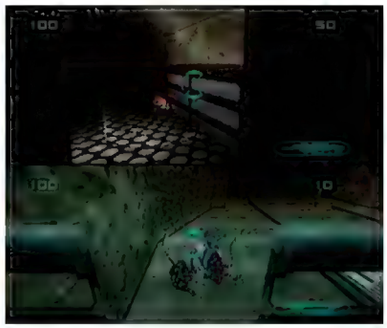
Captain MLB players and teams and lead them to glory! Teams win or lose baseball games based on the showdown between batter and pitcher, and that interaction is well represented. From a perspective behind home plate, pitchers can aim throws with great precision, while batters must match that precision in order to make clean contact. A "hot zones" system indicates the batter's strengths and weaknesses. Batters have an easier time making solid contact on pitches thrown in their hot zones, making it worth the effort to hunt for pitches in those areas, much like real-world batters. The batting physics creates a realistic feel for each swing, meaning that it results in a pop-up if the player swings just under the ball. In stark contrast to pitching and batting, the rest of the baseball experience is not as well-developed. AI-controlled defense is poor, with fly balls that a human-controlled character could easily catch regularly dropping in front of outfielders. Baserunning is also unrealistic. Double plays, which are common in real baseball, are extremely rare, while the normally impossible event of throwing runners out at first from the outfield is a regular occurrence. There are healthy roster options, including trades, created players, or league-wide fantasy drafts. Exhibition games, full seasons, or running through the playoffs with a team of choice are all available. The season mode is excellent and includes stat tracking and different season-length options. Oddly, it is possible to execute any trade during a season, no matter how unfair that might be. Sterling and Kay (the Yankees' radio broadcast team at the time) are a delight to hear. Kay's commentary adds depth, using player hot zones and stats to give accurate scouting reports during at-bats. The graphics are a bit rough, with some ugly character models and less-than-satisfactory animations. This rendition of the great American pastime is no home run, but the excellent batting and pitching carry it to a stand-up double.

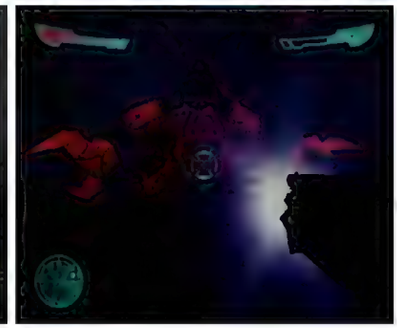
Reflections: My friend and I loved playing sports games on his N64, particularly *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey*, *NBA Jam*, and of course, *All-Star Baseball 99*. This title was my favorite of those three, and we spent many happy hours in his living room playing through 162 game seasons. I enjoyed it so much that I requested *All-Star Baseball 2000* for Christmas and would chant "A-S-B-Two-Oh-Oh-Oh" in my head leading up to that fateful day. I still enjoy this game for what it is, but I'll admit that the chanting for the sequel may have been a little much for what this game actually delivers. – JM

European Cartridge

Armorines: Project S.W.A.R.M.

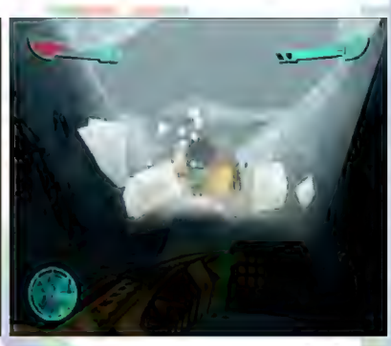
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios London
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆





Merciless space bugs unleash themselves on a helpless Earth, and only the highly-secret Armorines unit stands a chance at defeating them. This futuristic first-person shooter features both campaign and multiplayer modes. The former lets players choose between two characters – Tony "Gunny" Lewis and Myra Lane, each of whom possesses unique firearms that change the overall speed and feel of combat. Each region also has one additional weapon that can be found and upgraded for even more battle variety. Missions have specific objectives, ranging from exterminating bugs and eggs to escorting civilians to safety. Cooperative play allows two players to work their way through the campaign together with a split screen. In addition, competitive versus modes support up to four players and include Capture the Flag, King of the Hill, Racewars, and a traditional Deathmatch. Multiple saving options are available, and unlockable cheats can help struggling players see their way through the campaign. Circle-strafing and retreating with the C-buttons is key to pulling charging enemies into the crosshairs while avoiding the projectiles of ranged bugs. Slowdown issues and uninspired gameplay put this shooter far behind its N64 peers. While potentially compelling protagonists, Tony and Myra never get the chance to express themselves beyond pulling the trigger, and their superior officers radio in orders that are as flat and static as their portraits – "Kill more bugs!" Short, subpar music loops are particularly glaring when hunting through unclear level layouts and incredibly dark rooms, so to make the most of the situation, turn the brightness up and the volume down!

Reflections: Sometimes, ideas for video games are not generated by the development team; they're bought. Acclaim Entertainment purchased *Armorines* comic creator Valiant Comics in 1994. Two years later, their "VH-2" comic universe launched, and Acclaim began adapting selections from this new range of properties. Along with Turok and Shadow Man, the reimagined Armorines of *Armorines: Project S.W.A.R.M.* made appearances in both comic books and on the N64, not always to great fanfare, as you saw above. Of course, Armorines are hardly the most famous heroes to grace Valiant Comics' pages. The group also published the Nintendo Comics System series in the early nineties, including the *Super Mario Bros.* and *Captain N* comics. Instead of the dark and dull *Armorines* game, why couldn't we have had a Captain N shooter?! – DG



European Cartridge

Army Men: Air Combat

Genre: Flight Combat
Release Date: July 2000
Region: NA
Developer: The 3DO Company
Publisher: The 3DO Company
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

War with the plastic Tan Army is upon us, and the Green Army's best weapon is Captain William Blade of Alpha Wolf Squadron. He'll scramble into a green helicopter to thwart General Plastro's schemes, causing objectives such as destroying Tan bases, recovering a UFO, liberating biomutant bugs, and eliminating a giant super robot. Each chaotic 3D overhead shooter mission offers the choice of co-pilot between Woodstock to up the machine guns' power, Hardcore for more powerful rockets, Rawhide for a quicker winch, and Bombshell to add more oomph to napalm. Missions begin with the zippy Huey 'copter, followed by the bulky armored Chinook, the heavily armed Super Stallion is next, and finally, the Apache with its maximum destructive power. Decide well on a co-pilot because they'll be squaring off with the Tan force's helicopters, jeeps, tanks, PT boats, half-tracks, battleships, and ground infantry, in addition to rogue bugs like ants, moths, and beetles. Rockets come in standard, homing, and swarm varieties, each firing quickly and ripping through enemies. Napalm makes quick work of battleships, while flares call down explosive paratroopers. Once using the Apache's deadly laser, the feeling of power is magnificent, melting even the strongest enemies almost instantly. Flying a 'copter is buttery smooth. The Z button fires infinite machine guns, A fires stronger finite weaponry, B lowers the winch (to pick up ammo, health, and temporary power-ups like additional speed or power), and C-left/right are used for strafing. Graphically, the vibrant colors of the various allied and enemy forces pop out against the more earthy textures, emphasizing the unique strangeness of toys that come to life in our world. The sound design does a good job of adding impact to weapons, though there are no real memorable music tracks. The big downside is the optional overhead map, which shows minimal information. It'd be nice if it gave more of a heads-up on enemy movement while attempting to defend multiple bases or ground troops. All 16 missions can be played solo or with a second player, while the Officer's Club lets up to four square off in Flag-Nab-It (capture the flag), Food Fight (transporting food), Air Rescue (saving scientists), and Bug Hunt (take out those bugs!). There's a lot of goofy, arcade-style fun to enjoy on this flight (including co-op and versus modes), so buckle up and blast some Tan.

Reflections: 3DO seemed to find every angle for their Army Men franchise, transitioning from the earlier RTS titles to the third-person shooters starring Sarge and then onto Captain Blade's missions in Green 'copters. If you had a PlayStation, you might recognize *Army Men: Air Combat* as *Army Men: Air Attack*. Captain Blade's story would continue on the PlayStation in 2000 and the GameCube in 2003. This first air-based combat entry still provides simple fun through the toy motif and acts as a good entry point for those wanting to dig into the larger Army Men series. – CPr

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Army Men: Sarge's Heroes

Genre: Third-Person Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The 3DO Company
Publisher: The 3DO Company
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

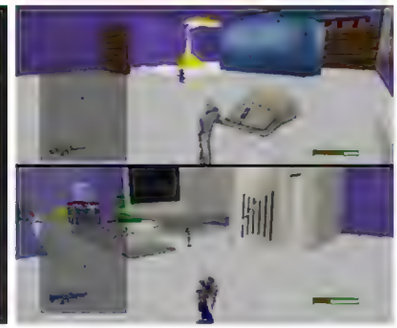
The Tan Army is on the move, Bravo Team is missing, and only Sergeant Hawk can save the day from General Plastro in this third-person shooter based on the small toy soldiers. Sarge runs, guns, and strafes through missions to complete objectives like shutting off power to an electric fence, rescuing and escorting members of Bravo Team, destroying superweapons, or securing the toilet from Tan forces. The expansive levels feature high and low routes, adding climbing and verticality to the action. In the Tan Army are soldiers armed with the same arsenal Sarge has, plus deadly ants and spiders, tanks, helicopters, and toy robots. Sarge has his standard M-16 rifle (with a generous aim assist and boxes of ammo to collect) and weapon pickups, including a sniper rifle, shotgun, grenades, grenade launcher, mortar, M-60 machine gun, flamethrower, and bazooka. He can even equip the minesweeper to cross minefields safely. Sarge feels like a one-man army, able to run serpentine through enemies while popping off bullet after bullet in between searching for health packs. Enemies are visible on the screen's battle mini-map, allowing players to know which corners to strafe around or chuck a grenade. Among the unique areas to explore are the standard military locales of forests, ridges, and forts and household areas like the garden, kitchen, bathroom, and living room (during Christmas, no less). The green and goldish soldiers stand out against the rest of the graphics, making it easy to aim down sights for some first-person sniping, with nice impactful sound effects. Cutscenes are filled with cheesy '90s humor, emphasizing that players live in a world of toy soldiers off to fight a war across bathtubs and backyards. It does sour things a bit how often enemies blindside from a distance, causing one's health to evaporate from a surprise bazooka round, therefore forcing a mission restart. Though checkpoints would be welcome, missions aren't overly long and are a blast to replay. With four-player multiplayer deathmatch support, players can square off against their friends. Relive the glory days of playing with army men around the house with a title that equals more than the sum of its parts.

Reflections: This spin-off from 3DO's previous Army Men real-time strategy games on the PC is a welcome change. The novelty of rushing past boxes of the satirical 3DO's cereal on a kitchen counter or blitzing through the living room to a checkpoint on a literal N64 box under the Christmas tree doesn't get old. The plastic/toy aesthetic works really well with game mechanics. All the enemies look the same? Of course, they're all molded to look the same! The real major eye roll comes from all characters being solid colors except for Vikki, the only female character and the only one with flesh tones. Careful listeners might recognize that Sarge is voiced by none other than Jim Cummings, famous for Winnie the Pooh, Tigger, Darkwing Duck, and many more beloved characters. – CPr

European Cartridge

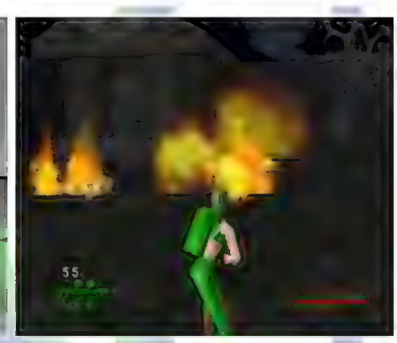
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2

Genre: Third-Person Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: The 3DO Company
Publisher: The 3DO Company
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆



The war between the Green and Tan Armies rages on! Sergeant Hawk, Vikki, and Bravo Team lead the Green Nation through this third-person shooter. It features the tiny toy soldiers across real and plastic worlds, starting on a dinner table, up a refrigerator, storming a castle, rampaging through a bedroom, raiding a toy store, and capping off in a pinball machine. The levels look blocky, but it works for the general theme. The unique locales are fun, made better by the frankly bonkers soundtrack choices. Sarge and Vikki have their trusty M-16 rifles but can pick up a whole arsenal, including an M-60 machine gun, a shotgun, a sniper rifle, grenades, a grenade launcher, a bazooka, a mortar, firecrackers, TNT, an airstrike, and a flamethrower, each of which makes satisfying pops and bangs when fired. These munitions are needed against Tan soldiers packing similar weaponry, miniature soldiers with half the height but all the firepower, zombies molded from multiple melted army men, black widows, robot spiders and scorpions, tanks, helicopters, super robots, and deadly robotic shock troopers. Standard enemies are plentiful and satisfying to wipe out while strafing around gunfire and explosions. In contrast, the bigger enemies rarely pose a threat and act as bullet sponges. The missions task either Sarge or Vikki with objectives such as securing a location, destroying rockets, intercepting an enemy operative, keeping Bravo Team alive, or escaping from a trap. While there is the freedom to climb on many objects, very few secrets lie off the beaten path. Enemies tend to appear only at designated trigger points, sometimes popping up around a blind corner to hit players with a flamethrower or bazooka, causing swift defeat. A radar mini-map is available on screen, but enemies won't appear on it until they've spawned, meaning strategy is more about memorizing the layout than in-the-moment recon. Some missions provide additional armor or temporary speed and power pickups, placed right along the scripted path as players plow ahead, rifle blazing while picking up health packs. Once tired of the campaign, up to four players can join for multiplayer deathmatches, creating endless opportunities to try new strategies. For Sarge's second tour of duty, he's feeling his age, but there's some fight left in his plastic bones.

Reflections: Army men have been a toy staple since the 1930s, traditionally produced in two molded plastic colors – green and tan. The classic WWII style of helmeted soldiers became the standard in the United States, always in green, while sets with German soldiers were gray (from 1962), sets with Japanese soldiers were yellow (from 1963), and ones with French soldiers were blue (from 1965). This color scheme plays out similarly in Sarge's many campaigns, painting the Tan Army as the bad guys (their goldish color stands out and makes it easier to locate them). The Blue Army consists of spies and stands out even more among the greens and yellows. The Grey Nation is just there, which is fine. Would Sarge ever return for a final war? Yes, but sadly, not on this console or this generation. He would be back in 2004 in *Army Men: Sarge's War*. – CPr



NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Asteroids Hyper 64

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Syrox Developments
Publisher: Crave Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

The classic arcade shooter gets revitalized for a new generation! In the single-player campaign, pilots select a spaceship with different load-outs (rotation speed, thrust, shield, firepower) to clear overhead single-stage levels of asteroids and space debris before moving on to the next, as per the desires of Astro-Mining Corporation. Each selectable ship differs in rotation speed, thrust, shield, and firepower, but all have unlimited laser shots to blow apart rocks and destroy other junk that flies around space, which can destroy the craft with a single hit. Ships can rotate/spin clockwise and counterclockwise to aim and shoot. A momentum-based thrust propels the ship, but players must reverse the thrust's direction to stop. It can take getting used to, but it is a fun maneuverability system that allows for some unique techniques, like thrusting away from a threat and then turning and firing while floating backward, enabling one to play defensively. Like its arcade forebearer, space objects and ships are not bound by the screen but instead will appear on the opposite side from where they entered, resulting in needing good reflexes to track them. If they loiter too long without clearing the level, alien ships may appear to "encourage" players. A limited, rechargeable shield that regenerates between levels can be activated to temporarily save the ship, while the hyperspace function will instantly move the vessel to another part of the screen. To assist the player and to spice things up, collectible drifting capsules may add an extra life or a limited secondary weapon, such as bombs, mines, homing missiles, plasma sword, nifty rotating gun satellite, and more. There are fifteen relatively quick stages per the six zones, where the difficulty ramps quickly, including peskier asteroid varieties like ones that are indestructible or ones that sprout crystals or creatures. A few zones have built-in hazards, such as a black hole, sun, or giant space worm, while one zone requires the Earth to be defended from incoming asteroids. These garnishments make the monotony of action more palatable, as do the few giant zone bosses. Graphically, the 3D polygons look nice, but asteroids can sometimes get lost against similarly-colored backgrounds, and the lack of music hurts.

Outside of single-player, multiplayer Knockout and Color Clear games are here for quarter-saving friends to enjoy. Unlockables in the form of additional selectable ships, Relentless mode (which mirrors the original), Hardcore Mode (no special weapons), as well as the 1979 *Asteroids* itself (save with modern sounds), may extend players' space-cations. While not the most profound voyage, this spacefaring title provides vintage, solid, rock-blasting fun.

Reflections: The original, beautiful vector-graphics *Asteroids* by Atari from the "golden age of video games" was done justice here by Syrox Developments. This modernized interpretation took a simple yet fun concept and stretched it as much as possible while staying faithful to its arcade roots. *Asteroids Hyper 64* stands as a sterling example of how to take a relic from a bygone era and upgrade it for the tastes of a new gaming generation while also appealing to its original fans. It certainly worked for me. – PC

Automobili Lamborghini

Super Speed Race 64 (JP)
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Titus France
Publisher: Titus (NA, PAL), Taito (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Put the pedal to the medal, brake, and steer while navigating a Lamborghini supercar in this third-person 3D racer. Start the adventure by squeezing behind the wheel of the legendary Countach or snarling Diablo and selecting the desired race. Arcade Mode features two different series with three tracks each, including the foggy crisscrossing track around a port city's shipping yard and the twists and turns of a European countryside. To win, players must make it through every checkpoint as quickly as possible and arrive at the finish line before the rival racers. Championship Mode pits drivers against each other over a number of circuits, with points earned based on finishing positions at the end of each race. Take on up to three friends in this mode, or go solo and test against a field of computer-controlled opponents. Color-coded arrows indicate upcoming curves, while shortcuts on each track offer a way to gain an edge over fellow racers. Winning in each mode unlocks more cars to round out the arsenal, including the Ferrari F50 and Dodge Viper GTS. Another fun option is the ability to add pit stops, requiring drivers to take occasional detours to refuel and change tires. The pit crew is controlled via the Control Stick, a fun touch that keeps the player invested even off the track. While motoring through each race, stay on top of the action by monitoring the speed, current position, and lap number. Acceleration is fluid overall, but cornering can be a little sensitive, with oversteering being a potential problem until getting acclimated. Track locations are fairly dull, with a limited variety of typical racing game environments. There are no options to upgrade the car's look or performance, and the music here is upbeat but extremely repetitive. These are not the striking sights and raucous sounds usually associated with all things Lamborghini. It is an enjoyable racing game, but it never conveys a sense of G-force generating joy.

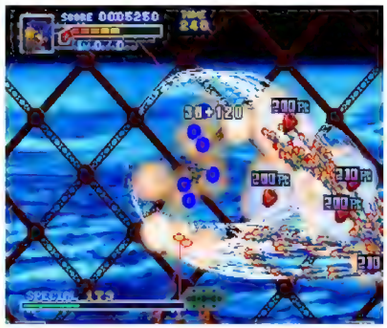
Reflections: Known as the wild child of the Italian sports car scene, Lamborghini is historically less buttoned-up than rivals like Maserati and Ferrari. A little bolder and a little flashier, that unmistakable charging bull accompanying the Lamborghini badge denotes pure excitement! Although *Automobili Lamborghini* does offer some degree of fun, it's not the pulse-pounding sort of adventure and attack on the senses one would expect from those wily supercar superstars. Where are the raging exhaust notes, exotic racing locales, and drooling fanboys freaking out at the starting line? This experience is a decidedly pedestrian presentation for a car brand associated with passion, playfulness, and power. – DM

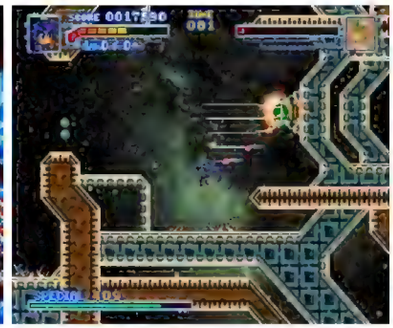
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Super Speed Race 64

Bakuretsu Muteki Bangai-O

[Explosion Invincible Bangai-O]
Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Treasure
Publisher: Entertainment Software Publishing
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆





Space bandits have invaded planet Dan Star, using it as a base for dealing in illegal space fruit. Fortunately, police officer Riki and his sister Mami are on the case. Piloting the mighty mecha "Bangai-O," they now race to liberate the conquered world, blasting everything across 44 hectic free-roaming stages. Despite the robot's titanic size, on-screen it's akin to an insect moving across a vast canvas patrolled by hundreds of other attackers. Mechs, turrets, homing missiles, proximity mines – the key to surviving these enemy swarms lies in simple, multidirectional controls. The D-pad delivers intuitive, eight-way movement, while the C-buttons provide independent circular firing. Indeed, depending on the option selected, the control stick can also serve as the trigger, fanning artillery fire with a simple nudge of the thumb. The L trigger acts as a toggle, switching between the siblings and their unique techniques. Riki packs the stronger attack, his homing missiles perfect for finding hard-to-hit targets. Mami is more defensive; her reflective shots are great for close-quarter combat in which they can repeatedly bounce through the teeming hordes. The greatest of these tactics, however, is the "special shot." By holding R, the player can launch a kaleidoscopic volley of ammunition. This bloom of doom grows ever larger depending on how long the button is pressed and the number of enemies nearby. Should 100 or more foes be clustered within a single payload, a shop will appear to offer temporary power-ups and weapon buffs, including invincibility and energy refills. However, the special shot is not inexhaustible. The aforementioned space fruit pick-up serves as its fuel, filling an energy bar that incrementally depletes with every special shot used. Destroying scenery – usually screaming people's homes – uncovers more of these precious foodstuffs, and players will spend ample time zooming over the wreckage to grab the awaiting treats. Each level culminates in boss battles that range from enemy-spawning of firing stationary targets to large enemy fortress ships that chase the player. The modest but charming graphics and upbeat tunes lend even more to this playful flavor, resulting in a genre-bending shooter experience.

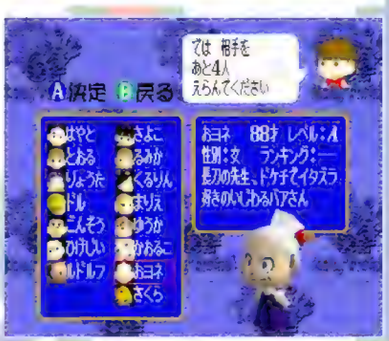
Reflections: *Bangai-O* was developed by Treasure, a company that was once seen as a bastion of quirky, 2-D gaming and exuberant pixel art. The studio has long since receded from the gaming scene, but its influence is felt through indie titles that surface each year. Unfortunately, fans wanting more of that unique *Bangai-O* experience are largely limited to the title's later 1999 Dreamcast release (featuring tweaked mechanics), a 2008 DS sequel (*Bangai-O Spirits*) featuring more complicated techniques, and a rather humorless series finale, *Bangai-O HD*, on the Xbox 360 digital Xbox Live service. – DA

Bakushō Jinsei 64: Mezase! Resort Ō

[Jinsei Explosive Laughter 64: Aim to be Resort King!]
Genre: Board Game
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆

Battle to be the King of the Resorts! This board game challenges a mix of four human and/or computer players to accumulate the most wealth for their personal corporation by buying, selling, and trading assets. There are two modes of play: Versus is a simple four-person standalone game, while Tournament features a seven-round bracket where the top two players advance each match. Players take turns driving their cars along the board by rolling dice and stopping at locations. Homes and shops can be purchased to add to the player's real estate, while specialty buildings offer unique functions, such as stock, antiques, weapons, or lawsuits. Purchasing contiguous homes on the board allows them to be merged and have hotels built on them. Hotels are high sources of income and can be further upgraded through expansion, remodeling, and affixing businesses to them, making them highly versatile profit centers. Players can also trade stocks in each others' companies. In-game events cause the value of that stock to fluctuate, so timing transactions around other players' acquisitions is a great way to raise funds. In the end, players are ranked by assets, cash, and the quality of their holdings. Despite the serious gameplay, the presentation is very light, with bright colors and groovy tunes. The variety of cartoonish, highly expressive playable characters (one group for humans and another for CPU opponents) include children, adults, and animals. CPU character choices determine their skill level, style, and personality. Up to five player records can be saved on the Controller Pak, which can be viewed from the main menu. An options menu lets players adjust talk speed, car speed, and in-game camera angle. This is a thoughtful, entertaining, and surprisingly addictive board game for everyone, especially aspiring hospitality magnates!

Reflections: Jinsei Game ("life game") titles are typically akin to Milton Bradley's *The Game of Life* – a simulation where players go through life trying to accumulate wealth. Taito's *Bakushō Jinsei* series is a variant that tweaks its formula with each entry, offering different themes and new mechanics. Elements found in *Bakushō Jinsei 64: Mezase! Resort Ō*, for example, borrow heavily from the famous property-trading game *Monopoly*. The depth of economic detail might seem counterintuitive to what looks and plays like a party game, but what is disguised as a lighthearted romp is actually a cutthroat landlord scrap. Small touches, like the quality of the player's car increasing with their wealth, show a high level of attention to detail. While not for everyone, this is a strong entry in a series that's worth the investment. – DG



Banjo-Kazooie

Banjo to Kazooie no Daibōken (JP)
Genre: Action-Adventure, Platformer
Release Date: May 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Two companions who literally have each other's backs – Banjo the Honey Bear and Kazooie the Breegull – go on a quirky, fun, and challenging 3D third-person adventure to rescue Banjo's sister. Grunty, the witch, does everything in her power to stop the pair as they work through nine distinct worlds, including the spooky surroundings of Mad Monster Mansion and the smelly and dangerous Bubblegloop Swamp, which feature well-textured graphics that lend each area richness and depth in its visual variety. Banjo and Kazooie move around as a single unit; Kazooie automatically pops out of Banjo's backpack to take over during a Talon Trot or other bird-centric abilities. The main area of Grunty's Lair provides access to each world. However, the entrances are only available after finding the corresponding jigsaw puzzle and inserting the required number of missing pieces, called Jiggies, which the duo finds throughout the experience (10 in each world and 10 in the Lair). The nine areas also have other vital collectibles, like music notes that unlock doors in Grunty's Lair and honeycomb pieces that count towards increasing Banjo and Kazooie's health. The pair can earn Jiggies by working through precarious platforms, perplexing puzzles, and many evil enemies, such as jumping clams, snowball-wielding snowmen, and disembodied mummy arms. They do not undertake their adventure unarmed, as spread throughout the worlds are molehills where Bottles the Mole teaches them over a dozen special moves. For instance, the Flap Flip produces an extra high jump for hard-to-reach platforms, and the Beak Bomb is an attack Kazooie can use while carrying Banjo during Flight. Special moves become available incrementally, and movement control is clean and smooth. The learning curve feels natural yet challenging, enough to encourage experimenting and mastering everything at an unhurried pace.

Despite Grunty's minions and the occasional boss fight (larger monsters who must be dealt with in a particular way, like Boss Boom Box in Rusty Bucket Bay, who splits into several sets of smaller boxes), exploration is the main focus. Should those enemies (or too many high falls) chip away all of the health bar, the duo lose a life and are respawned at the beginning of the world, keeping all of their Jiggies but losing musical notes. Once enough Jiggies, notes, or a combination of both have been acquired to unlock the next area, the pair can explore them in any order and can always revisit previous worlds. This free exploration becomes almost necessary towards the end when the unlocking requirements become increasingly tight. To get to the final battle with Grunty, Banjo and Kazooie must collect all 100 Jiggies and nearly all the music notes. This requirement may seem overly daunting, but the sense of accomplishment afterward is well worth the effort of traversing every inch of the immersive worlds where visual diversity is not lacking. Having to master underwater navigation, aerial maneuvers, and quick, precise movement – all while surrounded by goofy sound effects and music fitting to each world's unique theme – the bickering, joking cartoon partners have little to complain about in this near-perfect experience.

Reflections: There is much to appreciate about *Banjo-Kazooie*. The bright and colorful graphics and the joking insults can appeal to younger players, while the size and complexity of the worlds and mastering abilities can appeal to older ones. I found multiple layers of satisfaction throughout collecting all ten Jiggies, all 100 musical notes, finding the next jigsaw puzzle, etc. I was constantly rewarded for playing. As for music, each world has its own track, including Grunty's Lair. Considering how much time you spend there, this might seem repetitive, but parts of the Lair have a distinct take, such as the snowy area towards Freezeezy Peak using sleigh bell sounds. This Rare title is fantastic and fun, and there's a reason why it is considered one of the system's best titles. It's a must-play for everyone! – KY

European Cartridge

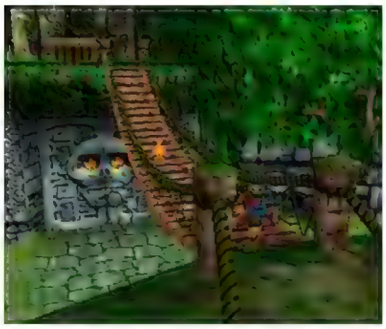
Japanese Cartridge

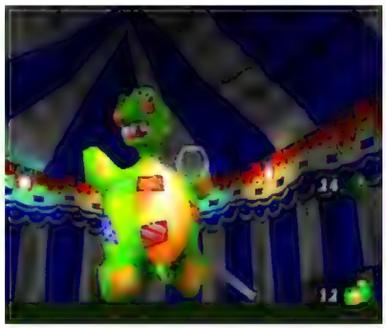
Australian Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

Banjo-Tooie

Banjo to Kazooie no Daibōken 2 (JP)
Genre: Action-Adventure, Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆





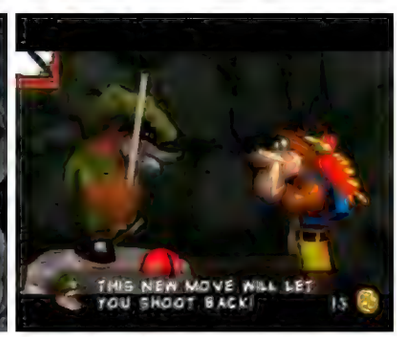
Two years after her defeat at the hands of the bear/bird duo, Banjo and Kazooie, Gruntilda is freed from imprisonment by her sisters. Their plot to raise Grunty to her former glory brings the heroic (if mouthy) pair back to adventuring to stop her! This action-packed 3D platformer starts Banjo and Kazooie out with a catalog of abilities, including the Talon Trot for running and the Beak Buster for destroying objects. In the main world of Isle o' Hags, the duo accesses additional worlds through entrances in each area. Master Jiggywiggy unseals the openings after one of his jigsaw Challenges is solved. These puzzles become available after collecting the required number of Jiggies, which are awarded for completing tasks. Even if the pair can open a new world, they may have trouble getting to it if it is behind a barrier that they have not learned the necessary skill to overcome. For example, they cannot enter the Wasteland until they know the Kazooie-only Talon Torpedo found in Jolly Roger's Lagoon. In Banjo and Kazooie's way are a range of enemies (fitting the theme of the various worlds), such as the wrenches and robots of Grunty Industries, as well as several common ones, like the electrifying Minjos, who look and sound like the colorful Jinjos that Banjo and Kazooie need to rescue. Guarding one of the Jiggies in each world is a high-action boss battle. For instance, Targitzan, a multileveled totem pole with targets around it, occasionally sends tiger warriors and dart shooters. Meanwhile, Old King Coal is a giant golem that periodically heats the floor to force the bear and bird onto platforms to avoid damage. When the duo does get hurt, they lose a unit of honeycomb, and once they are all gone, the pair are sent back to the world's entrance for another try. The ultimate goal is to get to Cauldron Keep, where they face Gruntilda for a final showdown.

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Banjo to Kazooie no Daibōken 2

Australian Cartridge

Controlling Banjo and Kazooie is a smooth ordeal with few camera issues. Shooting the variety of eggs Kazooie learns to use is easy with first-person controls. Many other situations, such as flying and swimming, can switch between third- and first-person perspectives for more accurate movement and firing. In addition, some tasks force the camera to look through the eyes of the pair, like defusing dynamite in Ordnance Storage using Breegull Blaster (where Banjo holds Kazooie like a shotgun). The extensive array of skills the two learn from the masterful military mole, Jamjars, is necessary to explore the enormous size of each world. The sheer scale is this fantastic experience's biggest downfall since there are few signs or other indicators about the pair's location and where they can proceed next. The handful of Warp Pads helps make travel more convenient, but the duo must activate them before use. Thankfully, getting lost is made less frustrating due to the upbeat music with diverse worlds and accompanying graphics. For multiplayer fun, there is the ability to replay unlocked bosses, cutscenes, as well as mini-games in single and multiplayer form some bird-on-bear-on-bird-on-bear action! With so many areas to explore, items to collect, secrets to find, and skills to master, Banjo and Kazooie's return is sure to provide many hours of fast action and entertainment. It won't be long before they float through the air with the greatest of ease, the two gliding like the man on the flying trapeze.



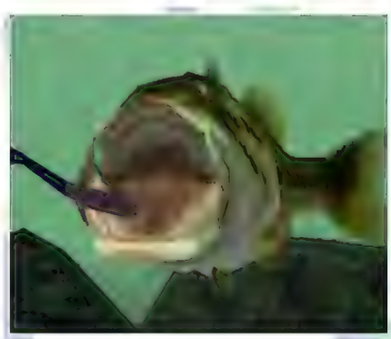
Reflections: Despite the overly ambitious size of the worlds and the seemingly daunting task of seeking out and collecting 70 of the 90 available Jiggies to take on Grunty, I love *Banjo-Tooie* more than *Banjo-Kazooie*. The graphics are better, the abilities are more varied, and who doesn't love motoring around as an adorable armored money van? That's right, while you can directly control Mumbo Jumbo and magick around each world, his rival, the equally talented Humba Wumba, transforms the duo into other creatures in exchange for a Glowbo! There is just as much emphasis on exploration as the predecessor. Still, your focus is less on finding every last item and more on using every ability to float, fly, climb, dive, and whatever else you need to get to an area. I felt I was tasked more with becoming skillful at the mechanics than simply searching every nook and cranny. Also, while each world is distinct in its style, the way they were all connected and flowed felt more organic. It didn't have the impact of its predecessor, but personally, I'd Banjo-Choosie *Banjo-Tooie* every time. – KY

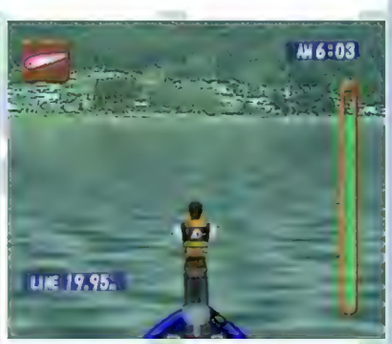
Bass Rush: ECOGEAR PowerWorm Championship

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Visco
Publisher: Visco
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

For those who have had their fill of virtual bass fishing in the United States, the waters of Japan are accessible enough for all enthusiasts of the genre. Pursue prey from one of six real lakes, such as Lake Kawaguchi and Ikehara Dam, and nearly 100 unique fishing spots where nine species of fish await. The view of casting is from behind the angler, whether onshore or aboard a vessel. The presentation combines polygons and pre-rendered backgrounds that are not particularly pleasing to the eye. When it's time to fish, it is critical to watch for small splashes in the water before letting fly. Once the player chooses a spot, casting is simple. Two taps of the A button, and the line is in the water. From here, utilizing the camera options becomes especially important. One view is overhead, while another focuses on the bait underwater. Deftly swapping back and forth helps to determine proximity to the action easily. The fishing action is both accessible and competently executed while not sacrificing challenge. However, some hardened veterans of the fishing genre may feel unfulfilled. Free Fishing is the best gameplay mode to start since experimentation with the season, time of day, weather, and tackle is critical to success. While not particularly special, it's open-ended and an easy way to get familiar with the gameplay without consequence. For those with competition-ready skills, jump into Tournament mode. There are six competitions to choose from, each with unique characteristics. Time limit, target fish, and weather vary by location, with the goal of racking up the most weight. When all game modes have been exhausted, more mileage can be had by stepping up to Hard difficulty, which eliminates the underwater view of bait. Those who have run through the core gameplay will acclimate quickly, and a little more patience is all that's required to master it. For a more authentic experience, try playing with the Tsurikon 64, a fishing rod peripheral released in 2000. While this is a fine fishing game (aside from the graphics), nothing brings it above that level. It feels like something was left on the table. More varied gameplay, such as the integration of mini-games, could have made this fishing trip a standout.

Reflections: The inclusion of pre-rendered backgrounds allowed my mind to wander when playing *Bass Rush: ECOGEAR PowerWorm Championship*. Look, I understand that nobody is playing a fishing game with an eye for how a parking lot off in the distance is depicted. Perhaps it's because those backgrounds clash with the otherwise polygonal universe that surrounds your boat. I can't stop myself from wondering about the owner of that white car. Are they aware that their vehicle is pictured in a video game? Do they even play video games? Was it someone who was working on *Bass Rush*? Either way, you're a small part of gaming history, sir or madam. I hope you enjoyed your day at the lake. – KS





This title was advertised as being compatible with the Tsuricon 64 fishing rod and reel controller.

Bassmasters 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Mass Media
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

This 3D simulation aims to recreate a realistic bass fishing experience. View the actions of the fully customizable angler (everything from hair to facial features to shoes) from a third-person perspective. A first-person mode is also available for those who need a closer look at their prey. Using facsimiles of actual equipment from top names in the industry, fish on lakes based on real-life locations, all with the action being called by fishing great Shaw Grisby, Jr. In need of a tip? Legend Roland Martin is on the ready. The slick presentation nicely replicates the feeling of watching a televised fishing competition. Whether casting or reeling one in, use the analog stick to aim and tug on the line. The A and B buttons function as slow and fast reels, respectively, or press them together for a medium speed. Catching a fish requires a lot of effort (and there is no shortage of failures), but the real work is done before the line is in the water. Players must consider tackle, terrain, and weather to have a successful day. For example, bright lures are necessary to attract fish if it is rainy. Exhibition mode is a single-day event for heading out to the lake for practice. Speed Fishing has the player working against a timer; seconds are added for each snagged fish. Casting Game mode involves hitting various targets with the lure, which is a nice reprieve but lacks staying power. Finally, Showcase is the tournament mode to play versus the pros. Winning means better equipment and stiffer competition. First, finish in the top seven, then in the top five. Stick it out all the way and receive an invitation to the Bass Masters Classic, the granddaddy of them all. A multiplayer option allows players to fish against each other in head-to-head split-screen action (but mind the frame rate slowdown). Overall, there are good controls, nice visuals, and accurate fish behavior, with plenty of playing with lures and catching bass. There is a narrow focus on presenting true-to-life bass fishing, and it does that well. It is a niche experience reserved for serious bass fishing fans.

Reflections: On the day I sat down to complete this review for *Bassmasters 2000*, I spent a lovely day with my wife and daughter at Lake Mead in glorious southern Nevada. We weren't fishing, but it was truly a perfect day. On the way back to the house, my wife and I discussed our plans for the evening, and I brought up this game. Later, I found out that two decades prior, nearly to the day, *Bassmasters 2000* publisher THQ went on location at a fishing tournament to record content that would be in this game. The tournament was the Kmart BassMaster Top 150, which took place on the waters of the very same Lake Mead. – KS

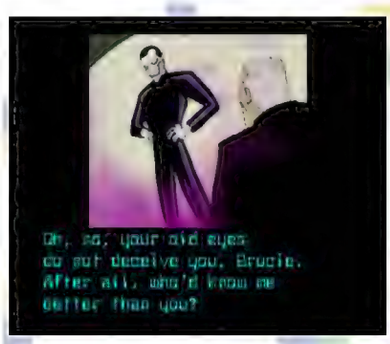
NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker

Batman of the Future: Return of the Joker (EU)
Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Dec. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Kemco
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

Based on the animated TV series and direct-to-video film of the same name, an elderly Bruce Wayne passes the "brooding crime-fighter" baton to a young protege. Players control Terry McGinnis as he assumes the role of caped crusader (only capeless this time) in this side-scrolling beat 'em up. Terry's mission is to venture through Neo Gotham City from the Air & Space facility to the Jolly Jack Candy Factory to shut down Gotham's own perpetually jocular, purple-suited troublemaker. Guide Terry through five levels, leaping, punching, and kicking through clusters of enemies and a gauntlet of obstacles to make it to the boss battle at the end of each stage. The player must muscle past deadly minions like the Jokerz gang thugs and poison-spewing snake men before taking on legendary rogues gallery heavies like Bonk and Ghoul. Combat feels sloppy and unsatisfying, with elusive enemy hitboxes and a limited reach for most of Terry's attacks. Many adversaries are overpowered compared to our playable hero, which can lead to frustration. Breakable crates along the way dole out health refills, 1-ups, and keys for opening locked doors. Stages begin by choosing a bat suit, each granting different offensive, defensive, and maneuvering capabilities. The starting Standard Suit equips our young hero with a magnetic nunchaku. Three additional suits can be obtained along the way and switched on the fly while figuring out which powers work best for each stage. Defensive Suit grants the patented shield-punch attack, Nimble Suit gives Terry a double jump, and Offensive Suit allows for a powerful rolling kick. Throughout the adventure, Terry will be given help and information via cutscenes from allies like Bruce Wayne and Barbara Gordon. The five levels are very short, making the campaign a quick trip from start to finish. However, players can only continue a couple of times before getting sent back to the beginning of the current level, which may be probable due to the uneven fighting. The overall presentation is blocky and simplistic. Very little of the striking style, moody atmosphere, or beautifully streamlined character designs from the source material is captured successfully. The gameplay, graphics, and music are beyond dull, and no aspect ever rises beyond subpar in NeoGotham.

Reflections: If there is one thing that I learned from *Batman Beyond*, it is that even Bruce Wayne is not beyond giving up. Bruce, being no longer willing to go above and beyond for his hometown, is beyond lazy! And beyond the shadow of a doubt, this game is as apathetic as our aging Batman! How anybody could think this game is worthy of the "Batman" name is beyond me! Let's face it – if the Joker knew how bad this game would turn out, I'm not sure he would have bothered to return. – DM



European Cartridge

BattleTanx

Genre: Vehicular Combat
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: NA
Developer: The 3DO Company
Publisher: The 3DO Company
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

In the wake of a female-targeted viral pandemic and nuclear war, American Wasteland survivors fight in roving tank gangs for glory and the few remaining women, now known as Queenlords. Experience these action-packed, explosive battles from a third-person perspective while guiding war machines to victory in split-screen multiplayer or a single-player campaign. There are three types of tanks to choose from: the nimble but poorly armored MotoTank, the all-around sturdy M1A1 Abrams, and the powerful but sluggish Goliath. Each tank feels satisfying to control and is well-balanced against its counterparts. Initially armed solely with the main cannon, roll over cube-shaped power-ups to boost offense or defense. These pick-ups range from extra health to invisibility and special weapons such as seeker missiles and a devastating tactical nuke. The primary campaign, comprised of 17 missions, follows Griffin Spade, a lovelorn survivor of the bombing of New York City and newfound Abrams owner. He must shoot his way through vicious tanker gangs across locales, including Chicago, Area 51 (complete with UFO), and Las Vegas, to rescue his fiancee from San Francisco and its doomsday cult leaders. Mission objectives involve annihilating enemy tanks, moving through no man's lands to reach goals, Goliath-based shooting galleries, and somewhat repetitive Battlelord scenarios. Multiplayer offers four experiences – Deathmatch and Family Mode involve single-tank combat, with the latter emphasizing offensive power-ups by making them the primary weapon. Annihilation and Battlelord modes are more strategic, as each player must control a gang with different tanks and starting power-up configurations, destroying each other or rescuing opposing teams' Queenlords in capture-the-flag style scenarios. Choose from eight varied and largely destructible post-apocalyptic cityscapes to roam around in. These arenas feature labyrinthine designs that ensure intense but often visually muddled shootouts. Griffin's journey is ultimately enjoyable and, along with multiplayer, provides ample bombastic action and glorious heavy-metal carnage.

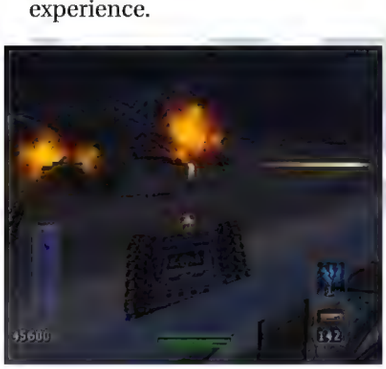
Reflections: My favorite aspect of *BattleTanx* is that it realizes the ridiculousness of its premise and runs with it. The tank gangs, represented through comic book-style illustrations in cutscenes and selection screens, always resemble extras from a low-budget action movie. The garish color palettes (oversaturated reds, yellows, and oranges) found throughout each level, along with the constant emphasis on explosions and brutality, facilitate this zany B-movie feel very effectively. The explosive action and attitude of *BattleTanx* did not stop with one game, as a port for the Game Boy Color and a sequel would offer even more opportunities for post-apocalyptic mayhem. – CP

BattleTanx: Global Assault

Genre: Vehicular Combat
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: The 3DO Company
Publisher: The 3DO Company
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

Variety is at the forefront of this hard-hitting sequel to *BattleTanx*, with more tanks, power-ups, and vicious post-apocalyptic gangs ready for explosive combat. The campaign picks up five years after the first and follows Griffin Spade as he fights across the ruins of America and Europe to rescue his kidnapped son from a mysterious gang leader. Control the tank from a third-person 3D perspective across an 18-level campaign (single-player or two-player co-op) or seven multiplayer modes. There are 11 tanks to choose from (some only available in multiplayer), including the returning MotoTank, M1A1 Abrams, and Goliath, plus newcomers such as the flamethrowing Inferno, laser-mounted Marksman, and heavily shielded Rhino. Most of the tanks move surprisingly fast, but this speed tends to come at the expense of maneuverability, making weapon control difficult at times. Fight using the main weapon (machine/Gatling gun, cannon, laser, or flamethrower) and collect power-ups by rolling over them. These boons include secondary weapons such as swarmer missiles and mines, extra health and shields, and a turbo boost that makes the tank feel like a jet. Missions offer a lot of variety, from pure combat scenarios to strategy-focused convoy defenses and prisoner rescues. The more strategic levels tend to feel somewhat tedious due to endlessly spawning enemies, but fortunately, the combat missions are the campaign's primary focus. Multiplayer offers equal variety, with head-to-head battles, Capture the Flag and King of the Hill clones, and even a competitive version of the campaign's convoy defense levels. There are also ten post-apocalyptic tanker gangs; each group features different load-outs of tanks and starting power-ups, offering a plethora of strategies for the 19 available maps. The graphics give off a gritty vibe with graffiti-style text, garish explosions, and downright strange gang illustrations matching the mechanical mayhem with aplomb. While many multiplayer and campaign options ensure non-stop action and carnage, the imprecise steering and aiming controls are consistent sources of frustration, resulting in a fun but flawed experience.

Reflections: Sequels often feel like attempts to outdo their predecessors (with varying degrees of success). I think that *BattleTanx: Global Assault* is an excellent example of that. The increased number of tanks, power-ups, and game modes offer more ways to engage with the core combat mechanics, but the focus on speed instead of tight steering and methodical aiming seems like a step down from the first entry's fantastic controls. On a positive note, the B movie and countercultural sensibilities that defined the visual and atmospheric direction of the first game are still present. – CP

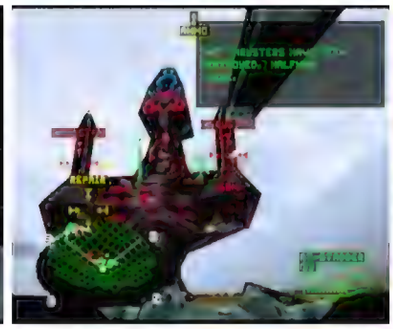


European Cartridge

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

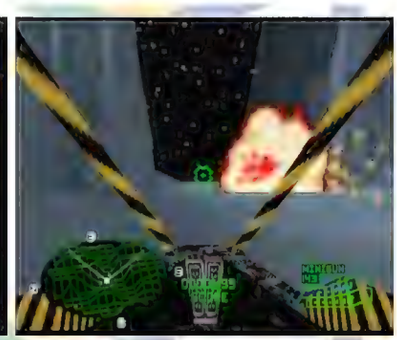
Battlezone: Rise of the Black Dogs

Genre: Vehicular Combat, Real-Time Strategy
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Activision
Ported by: Climax
Publisher: Crave Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆



This follow-up to the classic tank simulator combines first-person vehicular combat and real-time strategy elements. It is the Space Race, and an advanced alien material known as bio-metal has been discovered on the moon; three factions now vie for the precious resource. Players simultaneously direct construction and unit behavior while piloting war machines across various planets and moons, blasting enemy tanks and structures in the process. Unique campaigns for the American, Soviet, and Black Dog factions offer different missions, vehicles, and weapons. Single-player also provides three ways to play through the campaigns: Arcade jumps right into the action, Pilot adds plot and objectives, and Commander adds real-time strategy features, including construction, resource management, and unit orders. The starting monologue of the American campaign is strong, so it is disappointing that the remainder of the cross-solar system arms race plot is told through corner-bound text boxes. An extra Training mode allows one a chance to get comfortable with vehicles, objectives, sniping, and delivering commands to units. Three Multiplayer modes are included: up to four players can scrap it out in a split-screen Deathmatch or variable-lap Race Mode, or two can play a Strategy battle involving small cadres of vehicles. The ability to exit vehicles, snipe enemy pilots, and commandeer their now-unmanned vehicles is a nice touch. The well-designed vehicles have a bit of inertia that takes some getting used to, but piloting is pleasant. Navigating the Commander menu with the D-pad flows well and is critical to bringing the RTS elements to the console. The experience is not without its faults, however. The level design is notably dull, the 3D minimap is only marginally useful, and the frame rate can drop at times. An imperfect port of a hidden gem, this shooter-strategy hybrid takes great design leaps but does not always stick the landing.

Reflections: The original 1980 *Battlezone* was an early success story, challenging players to move and fire at enemy vehicles in a vector environment. Nearly 20 years later, 1998's release of an all-new *Battlezone* for PC again innovated, and while not a commercial juggernaut, met with critical acclaim for blending FPS and RTS genres. *Battlezone: Rise of the Black Dogs* does its level best to bring the Windows hidden gem to the N64 but loses some features and struggles to perform as fluidly as before. Sidebar – for a game whose most compelling element is its fusion of genres, it is surprising that most of the N64 game modes eschew the strategy mechanics entirely, particularly when they work so well! – DG



Beetle Adventure Racing!

HSV Adventure Racing! (AUS)
As Aventuras do Fusca! (BRA)
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts Canada, Paradigm Entertainment
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Want the fun of cart racing but with real cars? Then go on a Beetle Adventure! This informal third-person racer has 12 custom VW Beetles, six tracks, additional battle arenas, and multiple modes to enjoy. Single-player mode allows practicing on tracks, a quick race, or indulging in championship circuits that increase in difficulty while advancing. There is also an alternate challenge in Championship mode: earning points. The controls are straightforward and responsive, with multiple 3D camera views (including first-person). Crates are hidden throughout the tracks, often in secret sections that actually have to be sought out and found. Some of these crates grant speed boosts, but others hand out bonus points. Getting high scores can award continues and open unlockables, which makes going after points well worth the time. Each track is expansive, detailed, and themed, adding imaginative elements like a dinosaur on Inferno Isle, caves on Mount Mayhem, jack-o-lanterns in Wicked Woods, and more. Some tracks even change and end somewhere different than the initial starting location. Default cars include Beetles in different colors with low speed, acceleration, and handling scores, but Beetles with custom paint and better stats can be earned by winning races. There are even unlockable flower- and alien-themed cars for that extra visual flair. Up to four players can play Beetle Battle mode to compete to collect ladybug icons in arenas such as an airport, castle, and volcano. Power-ups and power-downs are placed in crates throughout courses in this mode, and they include items like invincibility shields, skulls that drain health, ladybug-stealing projectiles, and more. In the two-player mode, race against a friend on regular tracks. Energetic music and voice samples, high graphical quality, and an extremely well-polished presentation round out a very good racing experience.

Reflections: *Beetle Adventure Racing!* became a beloved N64 title despite (or because of) its peculiar focus on a single type of car. At the time, Volkswagen Beetlemania was sweeping the globe. The cars were so coveted that in 1998, a radio station in my area held a contest where people lived in a Beetle parked inside the local multiplex. The last person to leave got the car. The contest went on for months and only ended when the radio station offered cash and vacations to entice them to give up. Strangely, this game has another identity in Australia, known as *HSV Adventure Racing!*, swapping Beetles for "Holden Special Vehicles" while remaining otherwise mostly identical (although much rarer). – KN

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Australian Cartridge
HSV Adventure Racing!

Brazilian Cartridge
As Aventuras do Fusca!
[The Beetle Adventures!]

Big Mountain 2000

Snow Speeder (JP)
Genre: Sports, Racing
Release Date: Oct. 2000
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Natsume
Publisher: SouthPeak Interactive (NA), Imagineer (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

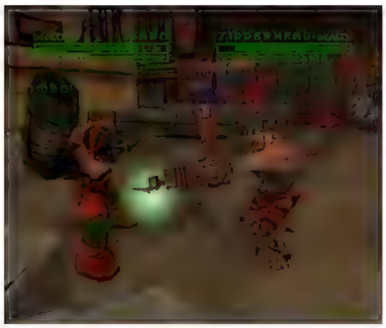
Snowboard or ski across snow-blanketed slopes in this fast-paced winter sports game. One or two players compete across four stages from a third-person perspective, with the option to zoom further out by pressing C-up. Each course is populated with trees and boulders to dash around, tight turns to navigate, and big jumps that grant the opportunity to perform midair stunts (such as the Back Scratcher) by pressing a Control Stick direction with the B button. Repeated success with tricks increases the player's rating in Championship mode. Colliding with obstacles and adversaries lowers a momentum meter, resulting in slower speeds and reduced acceleration. This interaction can be troublesome, as AI opponents frequently sneak up from behind and cause entanglement. Time Attack mode can be tackled to set record times on each stage, and 2P Battle provides head-to-head racing against a friend. The primary Championship mode features four courses, each containing three events against AI rivals in both skiing and snowboarding. The courses vary with features (such as trees in the lane, tunnels, and split paths) and visuals that do not affect gameplay (like time of day, ski lifts, and helicopters). The Free Ride event is a simple race against computer-controlled opponents. Slalom has competitors racing between gates littered along the track for as long as their timer lasts. Five seconds are deducted for each gate missed, which may be frequent due to the pushy AI. The Giant Slalom event is essentially the same, though with fewer gates spaced farther apart. Mastering each stage means placing in first a total of six times in these events, so get ready for a grind. Characters ever-so-minimally improve their cornering, speed, damage, and acceleration attributes throughout the events, so not getting first on a course can still provide a benefit and a better chance when retrying. Hard-earned ratings points also reward improved clothing and skis/snowboards that grant additional attribute bonuses. There is some decent winter racing action to consume here, but frequent competitor collisions and the constant grind of Championship mode prevent it from making a lasting impact.

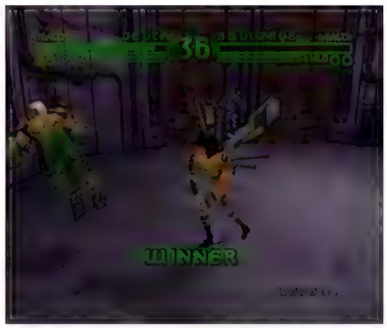
Reflections: Combining snowboarding and skiing in one cartridge is an interesting concept. Unfortunately, each one yields middling results, and both are held back by underwhelming visuals and a few too many technical flaws. Additionally, hearing each character with their individual "ouch" sound effect after every single stumble quickly becomes grating. Some of the technical and graphical frustrations may have to do with the fact that *Big Mountain 2000* was developed early in the N64's lifespan but didn't reach North America until two years later, forcing it to compete with newer games. This title is a semi-decent winter sports option, but I would only mildly recommend it after you have exhausted the console's other superior titles. – DK

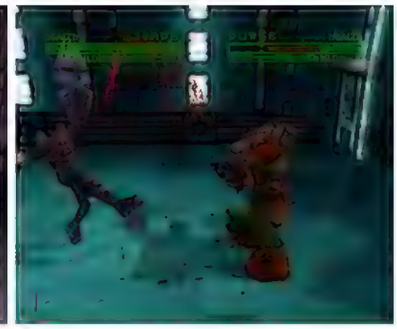
Japanese Cartridge
Snow Speeder

Bio F.R.E.A.K.S.

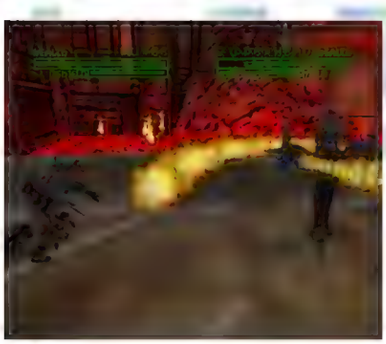
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: May 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Saffire
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆







Welcome to Neo-Amerika, home of the Techno-Industrial Civil Wars, where big business reigns supreme in this 3D fighter. Players command one of eight Biological F.R.E.A.K.S. (Flying Robotic Enhanced Armored Killing Synthoids), each representing a separate corporate entity, and battle it out one-on-one to the death. Punches, weapon attacks, and kicks are available, with each limb mapped to a specific C-button. Throws can also diminish the opponent's health bar. Hovering to attack and evade is available, as are ground dodges and back dashes to stay out of harm's way. Fighters also have a limited regenerative shield available, as well as normal blocking. Special moves such as PsyClown's puke ball are available in these best-of-three battles, as are default ranged attacks for each character, like Sabotage's machine gun or Minatek's mouth missiles. The imperfect and awkward controller scheme and difficult-to-unleash special moves can make fights frustrating. Gore is a central part of the experience, as competitors can lose arms, heads, or torsos either due to mutilation attacks designed specifically to remove body parts or an arm may still be removed due to cumulative damage. If an arm is gone, it results in an endless spray of blood while the fighter attempts to make do with their remaining appendages (limb regeneration is an option). Long-range attacks feature prominently, so there is less risk of forfeiture of extremities (although still possible!). It is satisfying to land a direct hit with an incendiary device from across an arena, though less so when drilled with a Gatling gun mid-throw. Each Battle Pit has damaging traps that hopefully the foe finds first, such as the fiery abyss looming behind a demonic Statue of Liberty. The battle is not just waged on the ground; characters can rocket upwards and fight while hovering. Players must dispatch all fighters and a pair of bosses to complete Arcade mode. Once that is exhausted, Team Battle is an option (between two and five players per team). A further challenge awaits in Survival, a marathon battle with no end, along with Practice and VS modes to hone skills and play against a friend. Some control issues aside, this delightfully absurd 3D gore-fest has the trappings of a satisfying fighting experience, along with the added bonus of decapitation.



Reflections: Fewer than ten percent of the games in the Nintendo 64 library received a "Mature" rating. Even fewer of those come close to meeting the exceptional violence packaged here. You can toggle the gore off, but you probably won't because it's fun. And while you may have never wanted to play a fighting game from a first-person perspective, *Bio F.R.E.A.K.S.* lets you do so with an in-game cheat. It's disorienting, wildly impractical, and fascinating. The control scheme is altered, and many of the pits are too dark to discern the distance separating you from your opponent, but you get a better look at spines jutting out of a severed torso. – KS

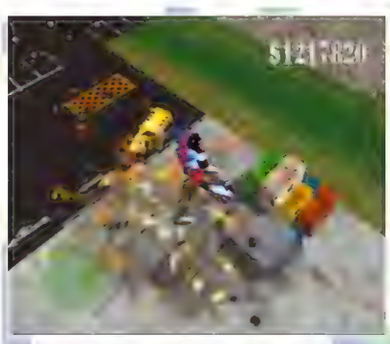
European Cartridge

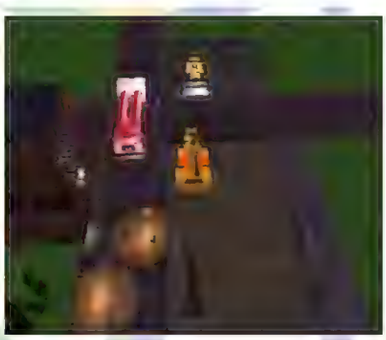
Blast Corps

Blastdozer (JP)
Genre: Action
Release Date: Mar. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Ever wanted to smash a bunch of buildings with heavy machinery? This overhead-view 3D experience presents this fantasy with over a dozen vehicles across over 50 missions. In each stage, the goal is simple: clear a path so a slow-moving nuclear carrier can drive through safely. This activity usually involves destroying skyscrapers, barns, warehouses, and other buildings with a given vehicle (all within a strict time limit). However, it can also mean moving train cars or other objects to fill gaps in the road, lending a slight puzzle element. Each vehicle has its particular method of destruction: the Ramdozer (bulldozer) crashes head-on into structures, while the Backlash (dump truck) has to pick up speed and then spin to smash buildings with its armored rear. More unusual machines like the J-Bomb (a giant mech) can fly freely through the air and must stomp down to crush structures. There is even a tricycle-like Ballista that shoots missiles, a drivable train, and a stationary crane. Controls vary from vehicle to vehicle, but step out of the machine with the Z button and walk around as a tiny human to climb into other vehicles. Levels can usually be finished in a matter of minutes, opening paths to new stages around the branching globe-like selection screen. Completing secondary objectives in these stages, like activating all of the RDU (Radiation Dispersal Unit) beacons, rescuing scientists, or finding hidden satellite dishes, earns bronze, silver, and gold medals or counts towards unlocking time trial modes and secret stages. The learning curve for some of the vehicles can be high, thanks to sensitive controls and nuanced moves. This difficulty is partly by design, as many vehicles are about harnessing unwieldy machines and making them do as they are bid (controlled chaos!). It still leads to a little frustration, as does the occasional indestructible tree that grinds the smash fest to a sudden halt. These drawbacks are relatively minor, as what is here is a fantastic mix of action, puzzle-solving, and unbridled destructive fun.

Reflections: By the time *Blast Corps* was released, Rare had earned its reputation as a powerhouse of a game developer. This title took more chances than the team's other releases, not just because it was a new property. Is *Blast Corps* a puzzle game, a racing title, or an arcade smash fest? It's not easy to categorize, which means it's not easy to market. The game moved about a million copies after release, which was respectable but lower than the team expected. It did earn high review marks and plenty of praise from players. When the game was re-released in 2015 for Xbox One in the *Rare Replay* collection, *Blast Corps* was seen as a favorite. High praise considering the Rare giants it accompanied. – JBa





European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Blastdozer

Blues Brothers 2000

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Player 1
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

Elwood must rescue his bandmates to compete in the Battle of the Bands in this third-person 3D platformer. The plot loosely follows the movie of the same name and takes place across four themed worlds: Joliet Prison, Chicago, a graveyard, and a swamp. Elwood can punch, jump, stomp (ground-pound), crawl, slide, throw his hat, and do a spinning attack as he works through areas. The C-buttons can even move the camera in certain locations, though it is only sometimes helpful. To progress, solve puzzles, such as hitting buttons in sequence to open a door, finding keys, and changing traffic lights. Collecting hidden music notes and an instrument is required to clear each world, along with beating a boss or two and reaching the exit. Enemies are themed to their environments, like guards in jail, turtles in the sewers, angry locals on the streets, ghosts in the graveyard, gators in the swamps, etc. Some can be punched or jumped on, but others are best handled with a slide attack. Although usually futile, sneaking past enemies by crawling is also possible. Defeated foes drop hearts, which fill a health meter and can be expanded by grabbing crystal hearts or coins, which provide an extra life after collecting 100. Other power-ups include spring shoes, speed shoes, and record players that reveal secrets. Mini-bosses and bosses are inexplicably gigantic, even though most are human, such as the lunch lady, hillbilly, and mobster. Defeating them requires simple strategies like tripping the warden or throwing apples at a monster tree. In a few infuriating sequences, an enemy chases Elwood toward the camera, making obstacles difficult to see while fleeing. There are also dancing mini-games, but they are essentially a series of bizarrely timed button presses that are more frustrating to play than anything. (Unfortunately, the two-player mode is strictly dancing.) The soundtrack should stand out in a story so closely tied to music, but sadly, it is dull and uninspired. The visuals disappoint, too, with blurry and generic textures around every corner. There is very little to enjoy in this uninspired experience. Both The Blues Brothers fans and platformer enthusiasts will be disappointed.

Reflections: I have been a fan of The Blues Brothers for years. I have mugs and t-shirts from House of Blues (a club co-founded by Blues Brother Dan Aykroyd), movies, CDs, and a sealed toy Bluesmobile on my wall. 1980's *The Blues Brothers* is, I believe, a perfect movie, while this game's inspiration, 1998's *Blues Brothers 2000*, is mediocre. This platformer, as well as its NES, Game Boy, and SNES counterparts (all published by Titus), is a textbook lazy release that doesn't even use the license effectively. At least the brothers' spirit made it into some good games: they inspired The Runaway Five in *Earthbound* (also briefly in *Super Smash Bros. Melee*). – KN

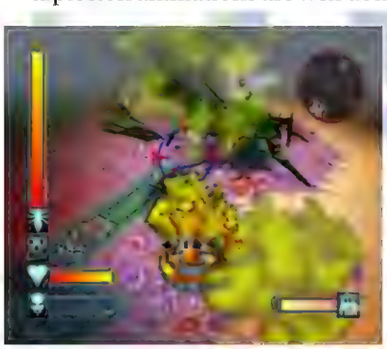
European Cartridge

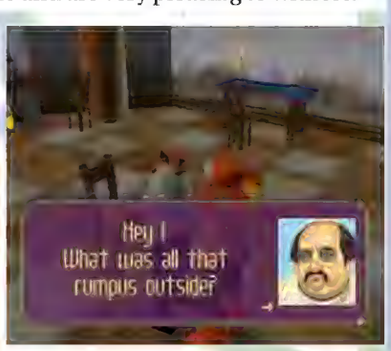
Body Harvest

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Oct. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: DMA Design
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), Gremlin Interactive (PAL)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Aliens have developed a taste for humans, and it's up to Adam Drake to stop them in this third-person open-world time-traveling blast-a-thon. The player must travel through time to stop each wave of aliens systematically harvesting Earth. Starting in 1916 Greece, explore and follow instructions sent by Daisy back at the Alpha Command Module. Incoming instructions can vary from finding items in buildings that unlock new areas or vehicles to eradicating newly arrived harvesting waves. The in-game display shows the player's health, weapon, ammo, fuel, and armor when within vehicles, humans lost, arrows pointing to nearby harvests or waypoints, and a radar compass. Using the map is extremely helpful in navigating the terrain, as new instructions often cause locations to appear. Setting a waypoint by pressing the R button on the map screen is a great way to stay on track. If too many humans perish, it's game over. Entering buildings and talking to NPCs is a pleasant addition that keeps the gameplay varied and engaging since many objects within buildings are interactive. Explore every nook and cranny for weapons, ammo, health, and even hidden passages and items! The tank controls for running around on foot can take some getting used to, but they are quite responsive with momentum. Navigating the outdoor terrain can sometimes be frustrating, as it is often unclear whether a hill is too steep to climb or not. Running around on foot is slow and leaves Adam vulnerable. Vehicles not only provide protection but also speed. Trucks, tanks, boats, planes, and even helicopters are scattered around the levels. Finding the right vehicle for the job makes blasting aliens easier, especially in later levels when Adam can quickly become overwhelmed. Each stage consists of several levels corresponding to map areas, and new save points can only be accessed after destroying an Alien Processor. Don't forget to save each time, as save points can also be used to replay previous levels, useful in case of skipping any hidden items such as Weapon Crystals or Alien Artifacts. Although the stages are exotic and representative of their locations, there is a lack of graphical detail. Buildings and settlements are sparse, and trees and other objects in the terrain seem lonely. Conversely, explosion animations are well done and are very pleasing to witness. Thankfully, there are a lot of things to blow up! The music is moody and contributes enormously to the atmosphere. This unique alien-blasting title should not be overlooked.

Reflections: *Body Harvest* slipped under my radar for many years before I first picked it up. I had a blast blowing things up, but the difficulty seriously ramps up after the first stage. Saving the humans was sometimes a chore, so a little mass slaughter before loading my game was therapeutic. Also, I love interacting with the bodies found in buildings; it's hilarious. When I play this, I immediately think of the Grand Theft Auto game series, which makes sense, as DMA Design was also responsible for those games. Nintendo's hands-on management turned *Body Harvest* from an RPG to a shooter and, finally, an open-world game, incidentally giving DMA Design the template for huge success in the GTA games to follow. – BC



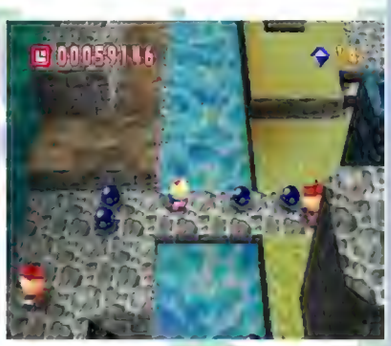


European Cartridge

Bomberman 64

Baku Bomberman (JP)
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft
Pub.: Nintendo (NA, PAL), Hudson Soft (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

The evil Artemis and her posse of vicious space pirates are menacing the cosmos, and they have set their sights on Planet Bomber! Get ready for kilotons of explosive action in this top-down 3D adventure as the heroic Bomberman sets out to save his homeworld from this sinister band of interstellar invaders! Armed with unlimited bombs, the pyrotechnic protagonist must blast through 24 levels spanning six colorful stages. Bomberman can blow up his enemies with his spherical explosives or temporarily stun his foes by using his bombs as paralyzing projectiles. Besides the bevy of baddies, many puzzles and obstacles also stand between Bomberman and victory. While Bomberman cannot jump, he can use his trusty explosives as platforms! He can also implement his supply of bombs to activate switches and obliterate obstructions. Bombs can be pumped up, kicked, carried, and detonated remotely. The difficulty ramps up steadily as Bomberman gets deeper into his quest, but destroying clay pots and crates can reveal helpful power-ups along the way. Hearts grant defensive perks, and Power icons provide offensive boosts. Collecting gems earns free Continues, particularly priceless when chasing down malevolent space pirates. Enemy thugs like Totem, Blue Fish, and Stalker Bat attack relentlessly, so Bomberman must remain agile! Players can manipulate the fluid camera at will to get the best angle, which helps Bomberman stay one step ahead of his pursuers. Challenging boss battles with Orion, Regulus, and Draco require Bomberman to set his explosives with aplomb, and timing is half the battle. Immersive set-piece levels whisk the avenging adventurer from White Glacier's hills of shimmering ice to Red Mountain's rivers of molten lava. A solid variety of tracks provide the score to Bomberman's explosive escapade, each tune adding an appropriate level of fun, excitement, and atmosphere to the experience. The hilarious voice-over taunts during boss battles are the real audio stand-out here. Several single-screen stages are available for multiplayer Battle, and players can even create a custom Bomberman for it using special body parts hidden in the main mode. It has never been so much fun (or stylish) to detonate and demolish opponents!



Reflections: Many players may know Bomberman for its famous and frantic multiplayer battle format, but this title lights a brand new fuse for the franchise, setting off a unique kind of Bomberman experience in the realm of adventuring! Plenty of bombastic action will ensure that you have an absolute blast. Whether you're pumping up oversized bombs to obliterate roadblocks or blowing unsuspecting baddies to smithereens, *Bomberman 64* is bursting with fun! Your senses will be bombarded with vibrant levels, creative character designs, and a catchy score. This game is no dud. Bomberman is in the business of blowing up bad guys, and luckily, business is booming! – DM

European Cartridge

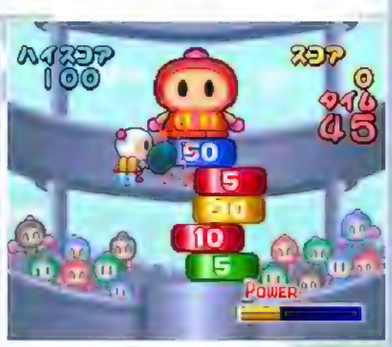
Japanese Cartridge
Baku Bomberman

Bomberman 64 (2001)

Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: Dec. 2001
Region: JP
Developer: Racjin
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆

Get ready to bomb and play a plethora of mini-games in this delightful 2D Bomberman compilation. Normal Mode is a single-player affair consisting of a series of overhead grid stages where all enemies must be defeated. The player escapes through the exit in the allotted time. The player is armed with unlimited bombs that are dropped and explode with horizontal/vertical flames after a few seconds. Bombs are used to destroy soft barrier blocks as well, but they can also take out the cute Bomberman as efficiently as enemies can. Some blocks reveal power-ups that can be attained: flame extensions, speeding up Bomberman, dropping multiple bombs, remote bomb detonation, throwing bombs, life-extending hearts, and riding the kangaroo-like Louie are only some available. All adorable enemies must be gone before that stage can be exited. However, the exits (usually two) must be revealed by destroying the blocks that hide them. The choice of exit branches out the path of fun destruction for 10 stages until a final boss fight. It is not a long journey, but replayability is high due to the dozens of alternate paths/stages available. Battle Mode is up to four human/CPU opponents with a nice variety of different stage layouts and team options. Outside of the spritely standard modes, the block-dropping Panic Bomber puzzler is a change of pace. "L"-shaped blocks of different colored Bomberman heads fall onto rows and can be placed, rotated, and dropped, with three different horizontal/vertical/diagonal blocks of the same color in a row disappearing and lowering the block pile. Bomb drops and combos add to the proceedings. Same Game is a puzzle game that consists of different colored Bomberman heads that fill a grid board. The player clicks on two or more of the same color that touch to remove them and hopefully reveal more matches to eventually clear the board. Bomberman Park is an adventure mode where Bomberman walks around an amusement park, speaks to attendees and employees, and can play more than a dozen simple mini-games: a slide puzzle, a sword-slicing timing game, jumping moving logs for coins, landing a spaceship on the moon, and more. Achieving a high score for each awards medals to unlock even more attractions. This exhaustive Bomberman experience should please fans of the series and entertain those just discovering the fun of cartoon explosions.

Reflections: Colloquially known as *Bomberman 64: Arcade Edition*, this last Japanese N64 release is a strange yet entertaining compilation and mishmash of other Bomberman games. Outside of the classic Bomberman mode of past titles, Panic Bomber appeared on multiple platforms as the standalone *Bomberman: Panic Bomber*. Bomberman Park is similar in structure and style to the Bomberman Land series of mini-games that take place in an amusement park. In fact, several mini-games here first showed up on the original *Bomberman Land* for PlayStation (2001), while others were later recycled for *Bomberman Land 2* on PS2 and GameCube in 2003. – PC

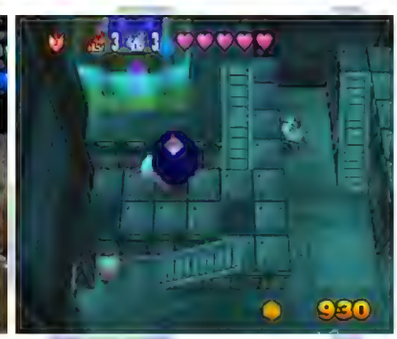


Bomberman 64: The Second Attack

Baku Bomberman 2 (JP)
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: May 2000
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Vatical Entertainment (NA), Hudson Soft (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Bomberman is back, battling the Black Hole Bang Army led by the mysterious evil mastermind Rukifelth. Bomberman and his adorable new companion Pommy must liberate seven planets from BHB's hapless but cute forces in this 3D action title. The player must destroy a Gravity Generator on each planet and defeat an Astral Knight. The do-good grenadier comes equipped with his standard fire bomb that blasts outward in a vertical and horizontal line of flames, capable of breaking barriers and destroying enemies. Defeating Astral Knight bosses will earn Bomberman their power stones, unlocking weapons like the water-freezing Ice Bomb or the Wind Bomb, which can blow Bomberman to new areas. Weapons and abilities are upgraded with items found either within stages or on the merchant ship between worlds. Power-ups can widen the range of a bomb's flame, increase the number of bombs Bomberman can drop at once, enable him to kick bombs far away from him, or pick up and throw bombs. He can also collect pieces of the Guardian Armor, which grants these abilities permanently. Also found within levels are food items to feed Pommy, who eventually evolves into a more powerful creature, depending on his diet. Vegetables will make him smarter, while meat will make him more powerful. Pommy can also be controlled by the second player, adding a cooperative element to the campaign. Each planet is themed, with Ocean Planet Aquanet standing alongside Nature Planet Neverland and Game Planet Starlight. Each world's slate of unique enemies employs varying attacks and defenses, so Bomberman can't just toss bombs without regard to the enemy type and expect to make it through. When it's time to get competitive, Battle Mode offers eight multiplayer stages, several types of play, and a Challenge Battle Mode against CPU opponents. Survival is the classic last-man-standing mode, but four additional ones are unlockable by winning gold cups in Challenge Battle Mode: Battle Royale (most kills in a set amount of time), King & Knights (teams battling to eliminate each other's King), Key Trial (a race to find hidden keys), and Score Attack (a race to gain points from items). Players can customize their own Bomberman for Battle Mode and take it on the go using a Controller Pak. The graphics are colorful and vibrant, and Bomberman and Pommy's facial expressions are a delight. The music is upbeat, if forgettable, and fits the lighthearted tone well. Seasoned demolitionists and newcomers alike will find this title a welcome addition to their N64 library.

Reflections: The single-player campaign here is enjoyable, if nothing special. The story is formulaic, a little nonsensical, but adorable, and the puzzles are Legend of Zelda-esque brain teasers that, while not particularly taxing, require some patience and thought. The real meat of *Bomberman 64: The Second Attack*, though, lies in its multiplayer, which makes a welcome return after *Bomberman Hero*'s inexcusable lack thereof. Players can even customize their Bomber-person for more exciting shenanigans. There are few things like the feeling of dropping four friends onto a couch together with a Bomberman title and spending an hour or two blasting each other to bits. – CW



Japanese Cartridge
Baku Bomberman 2

Bomberman Hero

Bomberman Hero: Mirian-Ōjo o Sukue! (JP)
[Bomberman Hero: Rescue Princess Millian!]
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Aug. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Nintendo (NA, PAL), Hudson Soft (JP)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

The white knight of demolition returns for another round of explosive heroics. This time, Bomberman must explore five wayward worlds, battling the Garaden Empire's evil minions as he seeks to save a kidnapped princess. Rather than repeat the franchise's usual scorched-earth proceedings, the adventure goes full 3D platformer, forcing Bomberman through a gauntlet of linear landscapes where bounding over gaps and dodging traps is the essential prerogative. Of course, enemies are everywhere: robots totter across ledges like demented toys, trees spew poisonous gas, and giant flying worms give constant chase, spiraling from the skies. Bomberman, aka the White Bomber, meets these threats with his signature move set – a button press tosses a single bomb while charging the same attack launches a four-way volley. Similarly, bombs can be laid for timed detonations or kicked at unfortunate foes. Collecting bomb and flame icons further upgrades these abilities, allowing him to cause more explosions and those of greater magnitude. But watch out! The do-gooder can blow himself to smithereens as easily as his enemies; four hits and his life is forfeit. The cleverest powerups, however, are also the rarest – the Ice Bomb freezes baddies into icy stepping stones, and the Salt Bomb dissolves the otherwise invincible slug. This quirky variety extends to the worlds themselves, which have Bomberman hopping through volcanic caverns, industrial havens, and even an Egyptian-esque Death Temple, collecting gems along the way. Each jewel adds to an overall score that can eventually unlock some modest extras. Still, it is not just about the jumping or collecting; several stages require the pint-sized detonator to pilot a fancy gadget, from a torpedo-armed submersible to some weird, propellered headgear. These challenges complement the usual platforming nicely, as do the creative bosses who punctuate each world. Graphics and audio are likewise inoffensive, with eclectic beats composed by series veteran Jun Chikuma. The experience lacks that spark of pure ingenuity possessed by the genre's best but still provides an entertaining platforming escapade.

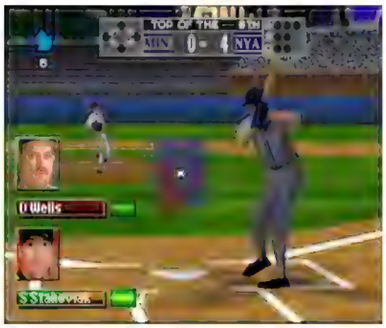
Reflections: Once a very prominent gaming brand, Bomberman represented the best in multiplayer gaming. The series peaked early, though, as its sequels became almost indistinguishable from previous efforts. Hence, *Bomberman Hero* is a game made to capitalize on the most popular genre of its day – the 3D platformer. However, although fun, it was easily superseded by the likes of *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Super Mario 64*. And worse, by eliminating the multiplayer element, the game denied its defining characteristic… nay, its very soul. – DA

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Bomberman Hero: Mirian-Ōjo o Sukue!

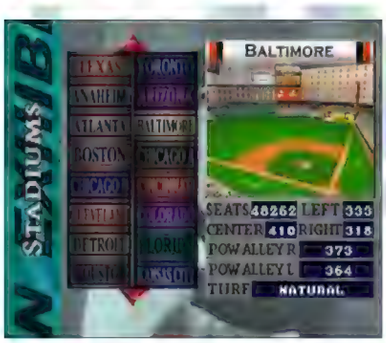
Bottom of the 9th

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Chicago
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆



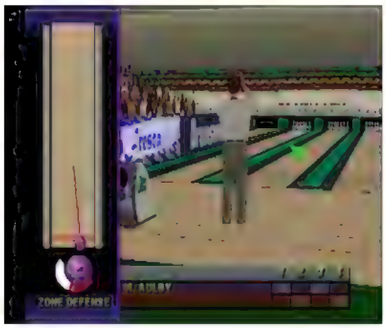
This austere baseball simulation is an updated version of the 1989 arcade title *Bottom of the Ninth* and features an MLBPA license. The camera sits behind the batter, facing the pitching mound, whether swinging or throwing. At bat, a glove slides around the strike zone and becomes a circle target to indicate where the ball will land. Moving the batting cursor as close to the target as possible and swinging (power swing is a smaller cursor) can result in contact, considering pitchers mix up fastballs, sliders, curves, sinkers, forkballs, and changeups that can force readjusting swinging and timing mid-throw. The cursor, whose size is affected by the batter's contact ability, can be somewhat sensitive to movement, requiring some patience and practice, though an optional automatic "Lock On" option can help. Pitching is a little easier, as the person on the mound and what they are capable of determines the pitch types available. However, when the computer is at bat, the competence of the CPU and the result can seem almost too random. Fielding feels nice, but the changing camera angle when throwing to a base feels unnecessary. Running the basepath is a little cumbersome, especially with the strange ability to make runners go faster using the L/R triggers. Players are based on their real-world counterparts in stats, thanks to the players' license, but they are physically indistinguishable, as models look nearly identical. There are several aspects of the current status of players for considerations of who to play, including a vitality indicator (whether they are at the top of their game or in a slump) and fatigue factors (heavy breathing animations and a health bar) for pitchers. Unfortunately, both team and stadium names are generic due to a lack of an MLB license, but stadiums match their real-world counterparts in appearance and dimensions. Game modes include Exhibition (for quick games), Season (an entire season or playoffs with one team or the World Championship with one/two teams), Training, Trade (mixing and matching players), and two-player head-to-head matches. However, the Scenario mode is a treat. It places the player into one of 20 specific real-season scenarios, such as David Wells trying to complete a perfect game for the Yankees or Ken Griffey, Jr. attempting to hit a walk-off grand slam for the Mariners in the bottom of the 9th inning. This experience is difficult to enjoy at first, thanks to finicky controls and overly challenging AI. With enough patience to work through it, it is possible to find satisfying baseball action waiting on the other side.

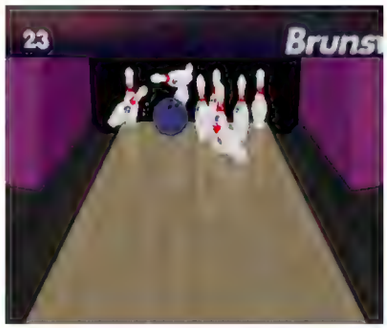
Reflections: This title's challenge and learning curve can initially be daunting. I struggled to get a quality at-bat when I first played *Bottom of the 9th*. I would fare worse in real life, but it is a demoralizing way to start a game. I'm not alone, as critics at the time noted the strange batting mechanic and controls that took some getting used to. Surely, baseball fun should be found in last-minute comebacks, clever strategies, and dramatic home runs, right? Those elements are all present, but they are much harder to find access than I would have liked. – RR



Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling

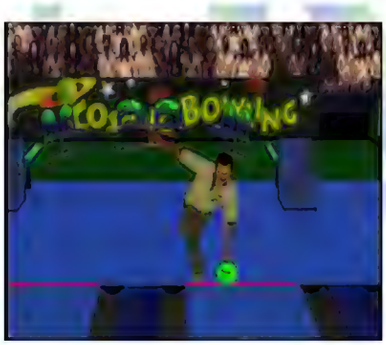
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Point of View
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-6
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

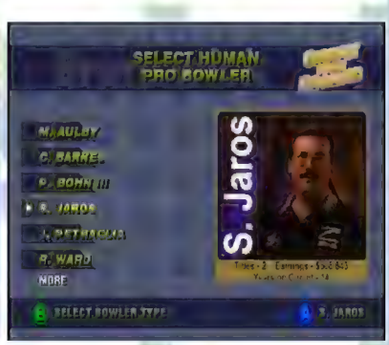




Grab some bowling shoes and warm up that arm for some sweet third-person bowling action. Bowl with up to six different bowlers at a time in six different game modes by either creating custom players or choosing from the included pro bowlers. Relax with an Exhibition match, start a new Career and join the world circuit, or begin a Tournament and battle it out with some friends. In Career mode, tour the world and compete in the circuit's best tournaments to amass earnings and titles. For multiplayer action, simply add players to the roster and pass around one controller or assign a specific controller to a player. If the feeling of loneliness sets in, CPU players can also be added by choosing the Add CPU Player option. Creating a player and choosing the Rookie difficulty is probably a good idea for beginners. It gives that character a longer preview of the ball's path down the lane, which helps to get used to the different delivery types to aim a shot better. Each stage is named after a real circuit stop and has its own oil pattern on the lane, which affects the ball differently from one location to the next. Different ball types with attributes are also available to choose from, affecting the amount of curve or speed. Knowing which ball to use and when helps when trying to make tricky shots. Players can also jump into the Practice mode if they need to hone their skills and master the 7-10 split. Taking a shot is straightforward; choose a ball, set the amount of spin desired, and determine a trajectory. Once all is set, press the A button to begin the approach. Two moving bars for speed and accuracy appear during the approach, requiring well-timed button presses to get in the sweet spot. If players need a change from regular bowling, the Skins game offers a nice change of pace and provides less stress and more excitement. Bowl two consecutive strikes to claim the "skin" for that round (and the cash). Otherwise, the cash gets carried forward to the next round. Players can bust out the blacklights and try Cosmic bowling if the Skins game is not flashy enough. This mode looks great but is the same as an exhibition match in one of the circuit's alleys. The graphics and animations are better than average, and the ball and pin physics are excellent, but the general game presentation is limited. All stages have a similar look and orientation, which can get repetitive. The music is good, but there is just not enough variety. Despite these limitations, this time at the alley plays well and is worth checking out for bowling fans.

Reflections: I have many memories of going to the bowling alley myself. Whether as a kid for parties, as a teen causing trouble, or as an adult with buddies, it was always a fun time. *Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling* is interesting and fun, if only in short bursts. Loading up my career mode to play a game occasionally is a nice distraction. But you know, that's just, like, my opinion, man. – BC





Buck Bumble

Genre: Flight Combat
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Argonaut Software
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Mutated bugs are running amuck, forcing the noble bee Buck Bumble to exterminate his irradiated kin in this unique 3D third-person shooter. Naturally, the best way to thwart an insect invasion is pure annihilation. Buck flies through 19 stages of garden mayhem in an attempt to scorch everything clean. Unlike conventional aircraft, Buck the bee can hover in place and turn with precision, adding flexibility to his attacks. Flying is accomplished by holding A, while the C-buttons toggle weapons and zoom in the camera for pinpoint targeting. Evasive loop-de-loops are also available via a quick tap of L or R. Apart from the straightforward seek-and-destroy and courier missions that carry most stages. Players may spend ample time exploring the various backyard and swampy landscapes for elusive items, hidden targets, and extra weapons. The 11 offered weapons are the greatest draw, providing numerous strategic and experimental options. Buck's initial laser pistol is rather useless. Still, the concussive multi-bomb is great for clearing ground turrets and herds of incoming critters, the steerable missile launcher is perfect for tackling gigantic beetles and other armored foes from safe distances, while the lightning gun can cook a swarm of chasing wasps faster than the meanest bug zapper. Moreover, honey drops and "point particles" can be grabbed for added energy and extra lives, respectively. However, a proper lock-on mechanic is lacking, leading to some clumsy targeting that aggravates an already inconsistent difficulty. Multiplayer options are limited to a basic deathmatch and a quick mini-game, which do the experience no favors, alongside the repetitive environments and shallow draw distance. The audio is a different matter, boasting competent tracks and sound effects further redeemed by an amazingly catchy opening theme – an infectiously silly musical ditty destined to outlast its original form of delivery. This song seems to promise a level of wacky fun that is never fully upheld, thus reducing this wannabee classical masterpiece to a bumbling, whispering tone.

Reflections: Remember Argonaut Software, the talented developer that designed the original *Star Fox*, one of the finest shooters on the Super NES? Why Nintendo didn't bring the team back for *Star Fox 64* is anyone's guess, but it does explain *Buck Bumble*, Argonaut's strange alternative. The result, presumably, should have been another exciting rail-based shooter, just one with bees instead of anthropomorphic critters. Unfortunately, the company copied *Star Fox 64*'s weaker, free-roaming levels instead, thus creating a slower-paced, meandering experience that lacks the sting of its source inspiration. All most remember about this game now is Buck's glorious theme song. – DA

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

(Disney • Pixar) A Bug's Life

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: May 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Traveller's Tales
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Follow Flik, the ant, on a quest to save his colony from the evil grasshoppers in this cheery third-person 3D platformer. Following the movie's storyline, he plays through 15 stages with various goals: reaching an endpoint, locating or collecting objects, and boss fights. Flik's moves include running, jumping, and throwing berries as projectile weapons. The main gimmick is the ability to collect colored tokens that grow different plants, each of which helps solve simple environmental puzzles. These plant sprouts include mushrooms that bounce Flik higher, leaf platforms that lead to new areas, and a flower that shoots out health and invincibility orbs. Using two seeds beside each other effectively combines them, encouraging experimentation to access new, hidden areas. Strewn across each stage are 50 collectible seeds, letters that spell Flik's name, which grants a 1-up, and a golden berry that permanently kills enemies on each board. Lesser berries kill wasps, spiders, and other bugs, but foes respawn until hit with golden berries. Flik has six lives and a health meter, but the challenge level is pretty low, as children are the target audience, so a Game Over screen is unlikely. The story is told using stills from the movie before each level. The characters look great, but the levels are relatively sparse, besides the puzzles and the odd collectible, are relatively sparse. Thankfully, the environments each have a different feel with varied textures and obstacles to give a sense of distinct locations, such as underground tunnels, a bug city made of trash, and a clover forest. There is a challenge mode with 60 stages that can be unlocked, but it is essentially just time attack modes for existing levels, which is not all that interesting. This platformer is faithful to the source material with fun gameplay and a camera that never gets in the way, although it may be too simplistic for some players.

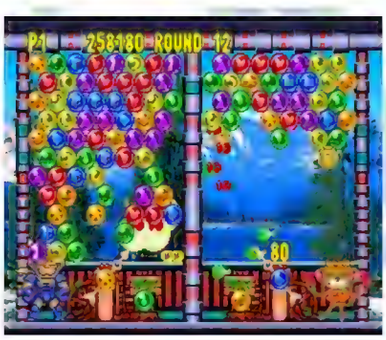
Reflections: *A Bug's Life* doesn't do anything wrong, but it also doesn't do anything exciting. I wasn't sure what to think when it introduced all of its collectibles. I despise hoarding random items because I need enough MacGuffins to unlock a door. Thankfully, that is not the case here. A couple of stages had me stumped for longer than I would care to admit, but it does feel good to finally figure out which seeds to combine in order to proceed. If you can manage to play this title without comparing it to the other, more popular 3D platformers of the era, you can have a surprisingly decent time. – JE

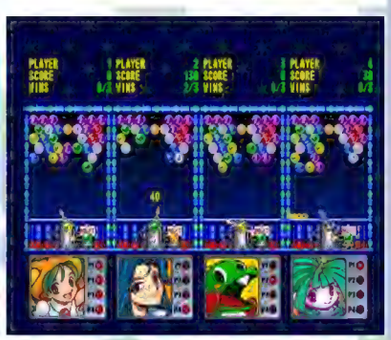
European Cartridge

Bust-A-Move '99

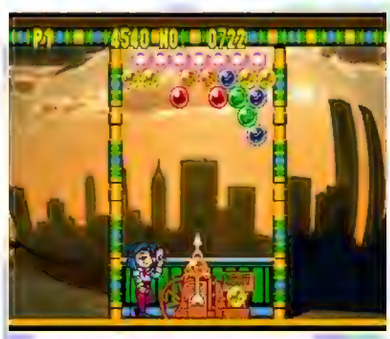
Bust-A-Move 3 DX (EU), Puzzle Bobble 64 (JP)
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Ported by: Distinctive Developments
Pub.: Acclaim Entertainment (NA, PAL), Taito (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

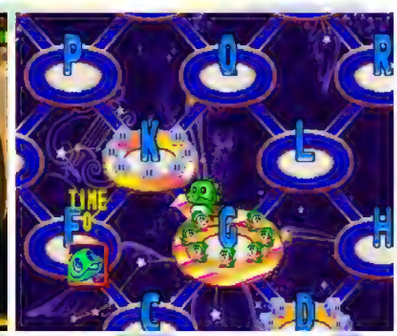
Bub the Bubble Dragon is back for more bubble-popping fun, and he brought friends with him! In each round of this arcade puzzler, he begins with a tank of variously colored bubbles clinging to the top of it. Below, he controls an arrow that swings left and right to shoot a new bubble. Fire one upwards and connect three or more of the same color, and the bubbles (along with others strictly attached to them) fall out of the tank. After every couple of moves, a new row of bubbles comes in from the top, pushing the rest of them down. If the bubbles extend past the bottom, the level ends. The goal of each level is generally to clear all the bubbles, which terminally connect to hexagon-shaped Bublocks. For the levels against an opponent (the CPU or other players in Arcade or Multiplayer), creating groups of more than three bubbles or dropping extra, connected ones produces random bubbles on the opponent's screen. Bub and his bubble buddies each have their own set of pieces they send over, such as Twinkle's Rainbows, which take on the color of a nearby eliminated bubble, and Marina's combination of three plain-colored bubbles. In these versus stages, players must keep the bubbles above the bottom of the screen longer than the opposing cute cartoon character, like Luna, the magical psychic, and Musashi, the martial artist. Even if this is not possible, there are unlimited continues available. Some modes allow character selection when continuing for a varied experience or a change in strategy. Fans of the series can find different ways to enjoy themselves, from working through the classic Arcade mode with its choice of levels or the ability to create puzzle tanks in Edit to Multiplayer fun outlasting up to three friends. Additionally, a handful of secret characters can be unlocked through mastery of the assorted modes. The graphics are bold and bright, with happy, toe-tapping music that drives home that this is a cute and entertaining experience. Who knew the activity of shooting and bouncing bubbles at other bubbles could fill hours of fun?





Reflections: The simplicity of this arcade series is what attracts me to it again and again. It is challenging without inducing rage and frustration. As with the previous title, the photographic backgrounds feel odd, but this time, I suppose I can explain it away when taken together with the assortment of characters from other made-up arcade worlds. It's still got those bright, colorful graphics I expect from Bust-A-Move games, and Bub's Arcade ending has him walking home surrounded by a rainbow of colored dragons, which delights me to no end. You can keep your fearsome, fire-breathing, land-destroying kind. I'll take this fantasy world any day of the week. – KY





European Cartridge
Bust-A-Move 3 DX

Japanese Cartridge
Puzzle Bobble 64

Bust-A-Move 2: Arcade Edition

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: May 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Taito
Ported by: Probe Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Ported from *Puzzle Bobble 2*, this entertaining bubble-popping puzzle title features adorable creatures from *Bubble Bobble*, including Bub, Stoner, and Baron von Blubba. There are three modes: Puzzle, Versus, and Time Attack. In Puzzle, the player has a single screen with a patterned array of colored bubbles. Playing as Bub, shoot more bubbles into the tank from an arrow at the bottom. The goal is to create a connection of at least three of the same color, which causes them to fall away. If other bubbles are attached underneath the matched ones, they also get removed. Over time, the top of the bubble tank drops, limiting how long each round can last. If the bubbles hit the bottom of the tank, the round ends. After 30 successful rounds, a fun cutscene plays to indicate the end of the game. Versus mode pits the player against the CPU or another player in a never-ending competition. Follow the same gameplay as Puzzle, except instead of the tank's ceiling dropping, a new row of bubbles appears at the top, pushing the others down. Plus, when creating a match that causes extra bubbles to fall, those additional bubbles are randomly added to the opponent's screen for colorful mayhem. When the CPU fails, the action moves on to the next of 12 total enemies, whereas two wins in 2-player mode earn a victory. Time Attack (which allows one or two players) presents similarly to Puzzle, except the goal is to empty the tank in the fastest time. Throughout the experience, there are special bubbles to fire, such as Star Bubbles, which eliminate all the bubbles of whichever color they first touch, and Metal Bubbles, which destroy every bubble in their path to the top of the tank. The colorful, 2D graphics are a faithful reproduction of the arcade original, digitized photographic backgrounds and all. Also directly ported over are the popping and upbeat music and the sound effects, which are motivating in their high-pitched punchiness. The gameplay concept is simple, but the inclusion of Time Attack, not available in the original arcade version, helps to add a varied experience to this cute puzzler.

Reflections: I'm glad the decision maker for this port (someone at Taito, presumably) went with the Japanese arcade version over the much less charming US version, *Bust-A-Move Again*. I need my colored dragon characters, not a generic pair of hands! This series has always been my go-to since playing one allows you to jump into any of them easily. I know I can't fault this port for its graphics, but I can at least raise an eyebrow at their choices for the arcade. I'd love for someone to explain why Bub has intense bubble action in front of a sandy beach, a Mayan temple, and Egyptian monoliths. – KY

European Cartridge

California Speed

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Midway Games
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

This arcade racer presents driving through 11 "realistic" California landscapes while attempting to outmaneuver competing cars for a coveted first-place slot. Various cars and trucks are available, with the option to choose rims and alter the vehicle's color. In optional third- and first-person perspectives, completing laps and taking home a win is mostly about hitting the accelerator and never letting go. Besides traffic, on-road hazards are few, and AI-controlled opponents generally stay out of the way, so there is no need to worry about avoiding obstacles, planning difficult turns, or hitting the brakes. Just drive, take in the Golden State scenery, and watch for the occasional shortcut. A manual gear-shifting option can give something else to consider while dashing forward, but it does not offer a competitive advantage. Each track is completable via exhibition races and the option to mirror them for a different feel. Players may engage in a racing series with three or six tracks each, offering the chance to unlock new vehicles by finishing in the top three. The original arcade circuit is available, and the California Cup has all the state's courses but adds weather and visibility concerns. Unlockable vehicles are fairly bland, although the default tiny golf cart adds some absurdity to the experience. In addition to solo modes, a basic two-player simultaneous mode presents an almost identical experience to the single-player exhibition. Bring a mischievous friend and have a great time; otherwise, it is just driving as usual. Environments feature fun touches, including accurate street signs from the commercialized Los Angeles through foggy Monterey. Wackiness includes driving through the center of a UFO in the Mojave Valley, to the top of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, or on the USS Midway in San Diego. Despite these welcome environmental details, the lack of a true feeling of speed combined with dull track design and flat, featureless gameplay makes for little more than a functional arcade racer. There is West Coast fun early on, but repetition may set in right when the thumb gets tired of holding down the accelerate button.

Reflections: *California Speed* is OK. Not good, not bad, but OK. Let's talk about something the game does really well: in-game promotions. Did you forget you were playing *California Speed*? Did you forget that it's in the Midway catalog? Don't worry; the game will remind you a few dozen times as you drive by roadside billboards. After seeing my third advertisement for *Gauntlet Legends*, I put the 1999 hack-and-slash game on my "to-play" list. Apparently, ads do work. I probably won't be getting a subscription to *Nintendo Power*, though. If you're driving through the Mojave Desert sometime, keep a look out for the creepy billboard message that was not meant to be in the final game, but it was an artist's placeholder that was never replaced. – KS

Carmageddon 64

Genre: Vehicular Combat, Racing
Release Date: July 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Stainless Games
Ported by: Software Creations
Publisher: Titus (NA),
Sales Curve Interactive (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Rare
☆☆

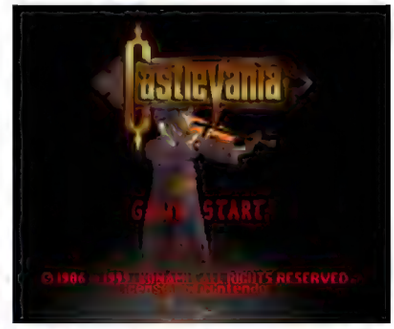
Zombies plague Earth in 2026 due to atmospheric toxins, and drivers compete to eliminate them (and each other) in this port of *Carmageddon II: Carpocalypse Now* from the PC. In third-person races (optional first-person), the player competes with up to five CPU opponents in timed races that end by completing laps, eliminating all the zombies walking about, or smashing into and destroying all other vehicles. Open-area locales like cities, a desert, the countryside, junkyard, quarry, snowy mountains, an airport, and others comprise 30 death races, which usually devolve quickly into a demolition derby. Each stage's timer starts low but can be increased by taking out the green-blooded zombies, with increased totals rewarded for combos, style, and "splatter" bonuses. Zombie death also rewards credits, as does running into opponents to inflict damage and "wasting" them. Credits can instantly repair damage sustained but also can "recover" – placing the vehicle back if it is stuck, upside down, underwater, or in another undesirable position. Besides zombies, pick-up boxes litter the stages, containing goodies like extra time/credits, free repairs/recovery, speed power-ups, jumping ability, the coveted Zombie Annihilator, and lots more. Permanent upgrades (armor, offensive, and power) are hidden but also available. Less useful but amusing are zombie mutators that distort them or even make them explode upon impact. Following races, players can switch from their default Max Damage or Die Anna character/vehicle in favor of the ones they wasted (if repaired with credits). Race cars, a dragster, a hippy van, an ice cream truck, and other wacky vehicles play differently and help stave off monotony. Every three cars completed unlocks a timed event where the player must reach a finish line, destroy zombies or rooftop satellites, complete a snow slalom, and more. Unfortunately, while the standard controls are OK for "normal" races, they are inadequate for some missions; for example, detonating all 12 mines at Mr. Jolly's Fairground trick track is a nightmare. Not helping matters is the plum ugliness and the limited, obnoxious soundtrack. There may be limited vehicular combat fun in single-player or three head-to-head modes, but a player's tolerance level may deem it just plain dumb.

Reflections: *Carmageddon* was a 1997 cult PC hit and was originally based on the Stallone/Carradine film *Death Race 2000* (1975), of which a sequel was planned at the time. In the original, the player splattered the blood of human pedestrians (good, clean, fun!), but due to controversy, the humans were changed to green-blooded zombies for the sequel. As an owner of both PC games as a teen, *Carmageddon II* was less appealing to me due to the toned-down gore, as the over-the-top violence of the original was part of its charm. – PC

European Cartridge

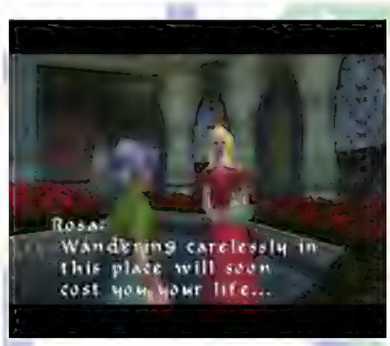
Castlevania

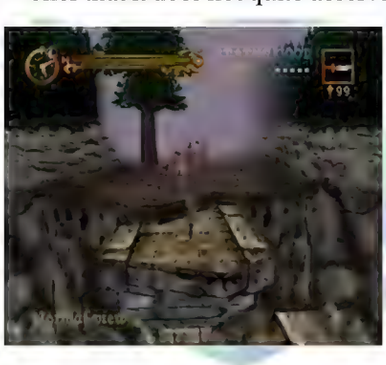
Akumajō Dracula Mokushiroku (JP)
[Devil's Castle Dracula Apocalypse]
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Jan. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Kobe
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆



Step into the shadows of Dracula's castle and put an end to the prince of darkness in this third-person 3D platforming adventure. Play as either Reinhardt, the whip-wielding descendent of the Belmont clan, or Carrie, a young mage with a ranged fireball. Creep, climb, ledge grab, and jump through linear, puzzle-locked levels such as the Villa, Tower of Execution, Clock Tower, and the Castle Keep. In addition to long-range magic or a melee whip, use secondary weapons such as the cross, which flies out before returning like a boomerang, and holy water, which creates a flame on the ground. Items are limited-use and powered by collected red gems. Along with weaker foes such as zombies and motorcycle-riding skeletons, bosses like a spider woman, a giant bull, and Death obstruct the path to Dracula. There is a day/night system that advances automatically or with the use of the Sun or Moon cards. Both characters have a good and a bad ending tied to the length of time taken and the number of cards used. The graphics suffer from graininess, especially around character models, who look like colored smudges instead of polygons. Attacking can also be a chore. Some enemies take a frustrating number of hits, and attacks can miss even with the lock-on ability. The camera is the biggest obstacle, making it challenging to see respawning enemies and causing excessive platforming deaths. Wiggling around to reorient the camera and even switching between Normal (neutral camera), Action (focused on the player), and Battle (focused on the enemy) modes sometimes do not help. The music is gorgeous, drawing on classic tunes from the series as well as some unique pieces. Many areas, unfortunately, lack any music at all. While this adds to the haunting loneliness of the quest, some more tunes would have been welcome. Despite the frustrations of camera control and combat, there is still enough to offer that it does not quite deserve a stake through the heart.

Reflections: *Castlevania* is a drastic departure from the tried and true series formula, and coming only a year after the excellent *Symphony of the Night* for the PlayStation made it a difficult adjustment. Once I understood that it was intended to be played more like *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* than *Super Castlevania IV* (SNES), I found it a valiant attempt to bring the franchise into the 3D era. Though the camera and lock-on combat needed another few months to cook, pushing through the flaws delivers a creepy, but sometimes frustrating, experience. This adventure is definitely worth a second look for veterans or a first look if you've never experienced it. – CW





European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness

Akumajō Dracula Mokushiroku Gaiden: Legend of Cornell (JP)
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Kobe
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save (NA, PAL), Game Pak Save (JP), Rumble Pak (JP), Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Man-wolf Cornell roars onto the scene in this 3D title, storming Dracula's castle to rescue his kidnapped sister, who is set to be sacrificed to resurrect the vampire lord. This action-adventure is both a prequel to and a director's cut of sorts to its predecessor on the N64. It adds new characters and new areas to explore in the same environments found in *Castlevania*. Climb, jump, and rip and claw through linear, puzzle-locked levels like the Villa and the Clock Tower on the way to the Castle Keep and the final confrontation. Cornell faces an array of zombies, ghosts, and motorcycle-riding skeletons, as well as a mix of bosses like a manticore and a giant werewolf. Cornell can become a werewolf at the touch of a button, enabling him to shred enemies with a close-range melee attack. However, this transformation cannot be undone and costs red gems over time. In addition to his claw attacks, he uses secondary weapons like holy water or the boomeranging cross. These also consume red gems, so keep an eye out for breakable environmental obstacles to keep them topped up. Defeating Dracula as Cornell unlocks the gun-wielding character Henry, who runs through a new set of missions in the same locations. Henry's tale takes place years later and is a race against the clock to rescue kidnapped children within seven days. Henry has the same core abilities as Cornell (minus werewolf mode), though his gun allows for long-range attacks. Succeeding with Henry unlocks Reinhardt and Carrie, heroes from the previous game, who must fight through the castle and grounds with whip and magic fireball, respectively, to defeat Dracula once again. Throughout all these character quests, there is some frustration with narrow platforming and cheap deaths that come out of nowhere. The distance between save crystals also borders on the absurd. The music, at least, is excellent, setting a great gothic horror tone with enough energy to keep up motivation. Though far from perfection, the haunting atmosphere, great music, challenging gameplay, engaging combat, and surprising level variety combine to create a howling good time.

Reflections: *Castlevania* was not a bad start to the franchise's 3D outing, but it lacked a degree of polish that hurt what was a competently put-together adventure platformer. *Legacy of Darkness* improves on almost everything the first game got wrong, most notably the frustrating camera angles. The inclusion of more cutscenes and story bits, as well as the backstory of seeing Cornell's village burning, gave me an emotional impetus to smite Dracula. Plus, Cornell is a werewolf who can transform at will. Not even *Werewolf: The Last Warrior* on the NES has that degree of lycanthropic freedom! – CW

European Cartridge

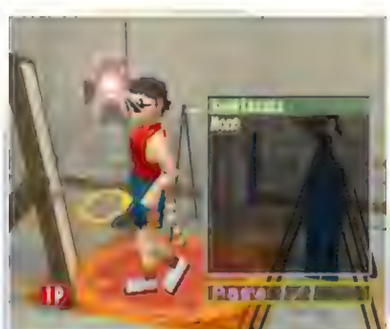
Japanese Cartridge
[Devil's Castle Dracula Apocalypse Gaiden: Legend of Cornell]

Centre Court Tennis

Let's Smash (JP)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1999
Region: JP, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: GAGA Communications (PAL), Hudson Soft (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Grab a racket and get ready to swing with this cartoonish tennis outing. Practice or jump right into a Normal Mode exhibition match with up to four players chosen from the default 16 male/female or created players. Singles, doubles, and mix competitions are available on six different courts in one-, three-, or five-set matches. These are presented television-style with an angled overhead perspective, with instant replays of specific moments and an announcer calling out the points. Optional camera views from behind the player and one that follows the ball are available, but they are more gimmicky than helpful. Court gameplay is solid if unspectacular – serves, ground strokes, lobs, volleys, and smashes are all here and simple to perform, with the idea of hitting the ball where the opponent is not to win points. Being in perfect position and timing the swing better results in a more effective/harder hit, but being out of position results in a nicely animated stretch or flail at the ball to get a return over the net. The mechanic of aiming shots works well except for serving, where getting an ace is a near impossibility, as trying for them usually results in a fault. Players can attempt a super swing by holding Z and swinging, but they must be stationary and time the slow windup to achieve it. Create Character mode is the pillar of the proceedings. Name and dress a player, select left- or right-handedness, taunt, victory pose, and cap it by appropriating limited points to individual skills on a 10-point scale. Created characters may be used for Challenge, a competition against CPU players in a single set to gamble for a piece of clothing or accessory. These occur on over-the-top courts with obstacles like a desert with scorpions, a volcano with lava explosions, or a city building rooftop. Mini Games are also available; these four practice games each focus on a core skill and reward the player with clothes/accessories for a top score. These won shirts, hats, socks, shorts, dresses, backpacks, and weird accessories (like devil horns and bunny tails) can be tried on and saved for the character in Dressing Room. Finally, the player can use their player creation in Tournament, where they compete for rankings in Opens based upon the four Grand Slam tournaments. Each match is a single set except for the finals, and items are rewarded for winning – it is not deep and comes off as window dressing for player customization. There is nice, if imperfect, tennis action here, and the goofy tone may be charming enough to overcome most of the (double) faults.

Reflections: The cartoony lightheartedness of Hudson Soft is on full display here and may appeal to some who do not regularly enjoy tennis games. Only two tennis titles were released in North America, so it is surprising that *Centre Court Tennis* did not get the nod. However, I'm sure *Mario Tennis* would have satiated that wacky tennis appetite better than this would have. Donkey Kong and Toad probably win out over custom-created characters with cat ears. – PC



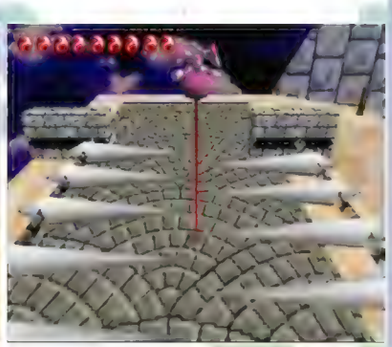
Japanese Cartridge
Let's Smash

Chameleon Twist

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Japan System Supply
Publisher: Sunsoft (NA), Japan System Supply (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Davy the chameleon (or his differently-hued but ultimately identical friends Linda, Fred, or Jack) finds himself in a magical, 3D-platforming world after chasing a white rabbit into a large pot. Now a bean-like character, Davy can run, jump, and use his tongue to grab, swing, and attack through six mostly linear stages. Tongue abilities will be tested on enemies and stage bosses, such as an ant queen that must be clotheslined via tongue before being vulnerable to damage. Pressing and holding the B button stretches out Davy's tongue, and moving the Control Stick allows players to manipulate it around corners or foes. Its primary use is in eating smaller enemies such as ants, rockets, or fireballs and then spitting them out either one at a time with Z or rapid-fire with B, as well as grabbing posts to clear large gaps. There is also a nuanced tongue flip maneuver involving holding Z while moving and springing at the right time for extra height – necessary to access some crowns or parts of stages. The tongue mechanic works really well. Once players begin to master the basics of grabbing and rotating around posts, proceedings feel solid, especially considering the forgiving design with infinite lives and abundant health. Enemies are not difficult to subdue – either gobble in one lick or eat a smaller enemy and spit it back at the larger ones (for instance, knocking over a long-legged jumping bug and shooting an ant at it). Where things break down is in the camera controls, which players will fight more than any other enemy in the game. Thankfully, movement controls are fairly responsive, but forcing the camera to align properly to reach a faraway post can be downright aggravating. The adventure feels just long enough to explore the tongue mechanics without overstaying itself, though around the third level is where the camera can begin causing literal headaches. On the visual side, this polygonal outing features simple abstract shapes differentiated by basic textures to convey such exciting things as stone, wood, or cookies. Those seeking more can try to collect all 20 crowns in each stage to unlock a bonus level or check out simple multiplayer combat matches, including a last-chameleon-standing mode and a survival time mode. However, there may not be enough to keep folks coming back for another tongue-lashing.

Reflections: *Chameleon Twist* is the quintessential shelf-warmer at the video rental store, always sitting there taunting you just to try it. And sadly, I wish I had rented it as a kid because it's a perfect weekend rental title. Of note, the tongue-flip maneuver was incredibly satisfying to figure out. It's a technique that is really hard to pull off but feels great to master. Sadly, the game itself suffers from the same bland 3D environments that are typical in many other platformers of the era, falling flat in any truly original theming. It's enjoyable for that weekend rental and then immediately forgotten. Poor Davy (or Linda, or Fred, or Jack). – CPr

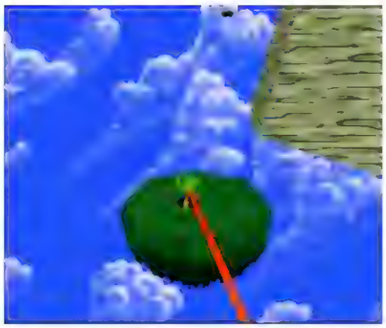


European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Chameleon Twist 2

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Japan System Supply
Publisher: Sunsoft (NA), Japan System Supply (JP)
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆



Davy the chameleon joins his palette-swapped friends Jack, Fred, and Linda for a 3D platforming romp with the white rabbit through six levels, this time having the option to collect 20 coins and a carrot as they proceed through linear paths toward a final level boss encounter. While the chameleons can't change their colors or blend in with their surroundings, they can stretch their tongues out to grab enemies and poles. Gobbling a small enemy turns it into a projectile, and grabbing poles lets the player pull themselves over. Tongues can also stick to walls, acting as a quick grapple with a bonus jump at the end for clearing some gaps or correcting falls, and when wrapped around horizontal poles, players can swing straight up to gain new height. Lastly is the umbrella, which can be popped open in the air at any time with the Z button, though this is used sparingly. Enemy variety in each stage is charming, such as the carnival having popcorn tubs that spill out smaller popcorn enemies or the ice world having penguins, snowflakes, and hockey sticks slapping around. Bosses have a memorable flavor, the standouts being a burger with the works and a feudal frog that flicks his tongue out at the players for a change. While a lot of variety has been added to Davy's second outing, there are some weird inclusions, such as hearts sometimes coming with a roulette spin that may not award any health at all or a star power-up that gives players a random effect, such as an enemy projectile multiplier, big head mode, invincibility, an uncontrollable speed boost, or the dreaded speed slowdown. The camera tends to be the largest issue, though it can be forgiven, considering stages have a fixed viewing angle rather than free control. Usually, the only reason to mess with the camera is to zoom it out when starting every stage. This platformer is a decent time waster, especially for anyone who enjoyed Davy's previous adventure, but numerous janky platforming segments hold it back from being something better.

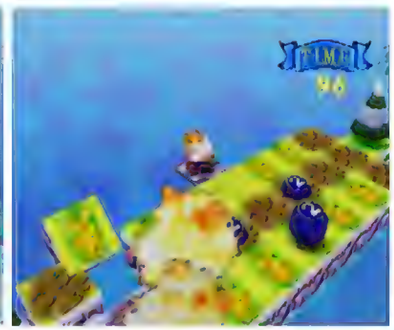
Reflections: Anyone who played the first *Chameleon Twist* no doubt wondered why the characters were all bean-shaped rather than looking anything like chameleons, which gives the sequel an edge in North America as all four chameleons now actually look like their namesake. However, making them more realistic cuts their expressiveness quite a bit. Plus, there is the nitpick of Davy going from blue to green now that he's an actual chameleon. I found myself liking aspects of the sequel more, but the new "cool" character designs soured things a bit. This isn't the case in the Japanese version, as all the characters retain their models from the first game. If you enjoyed the first one, *Chameleon Twist 2* is a solid follow-up, but it's hard to see either title as more than completely average. They function, and the tongue mechanic is enjoyable, but they're both overall unpolished and pretty forgettable. – CPr

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Charlie Blast's Territory

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆



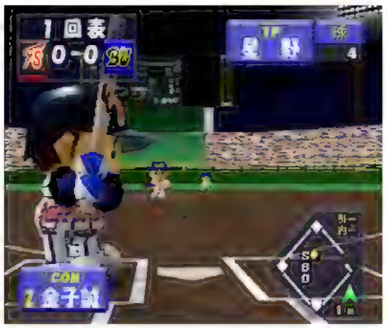
Charlie the construction worker is on a special mission to blow up a lot of bombs… if he can get them into the correct configuration, that is. In this 3D puzzle game with an angled top-down view, Charlie pushes various explosive objects on a shaped grid to create a combustible sequence to destroy an island and continue to the next of 60 total levels. There are several types of bombs, such as ones with differing blast radii and buried ones that cannot be moved but can be jumped over. Some detonators in each level go off based on a timer instead of needing Charlie to begin that process. The countdown in the upper right indicates the total time left for the stage, while the automatic detonators display a timer in the upper left. Charlie can infinitely restart a level if he fails in any facet of the level (running out of time, leaving bombs untriggered, or standing within a blast radius). He can also return later using the given passwords. To make Charlie's task more interesting are moving platforms, bumpers that force him and a bomb to switch places, and icy squares that cause him to slip. The changing elements of the stages create engaging puzzles, but the controls mar the experience. Charlie needs to move precisely, and sometimes, he wants to jump onto a box of TNT rather than push it. Unfortunately, the difference between turning to face a direction and pushing that way is a minor difference in the directional press duration on the controller. This mechanic results in many a bomb on the wrong square, requiring a restart of the whole level. Still, the variety of strategies needed to complete the experience can overcome the issues with controls. There are two multiplayer modes to entice up to four people for some versus action, including Territorial, where each player uses the bombs for staking claim over colored squares, and Survival, which has players attempting to blow each other up. This puzzler offers a goofy character with colorful graphics amidst otherwise bland music and sound effects.

Reflections: *Charlie Blast's Territory* is a redeveloped version of the Kid Klown series game *The Bombing Islands*, originally released on the PlayStation. It is one of those puzzle experiences where you spend way too many minutes staring at the layout and attempting to figure out the solution, while the answer could be as simple as pushing the bombs along the left side rather than the right. I love a *Sokoban*-like experience, and the added hazards and features make up for the touchy controls. While only puzzle fans will likely enjoy the single-player mode, Sir Charles Blastington III (as I like to call him) is not above slapping you across the face with his yellow glove and challenging you to a duel (triel? quadrel?). – KY

European Cartridge

Chōkūkan Night: Pro Yakyū King

[Hyperspace Night: Pro Baseball King]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: JP
Developer: Genki
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆



Pitch, throw, field, hit, and run to glory in exhibition games or an entire season with officially licensed Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) teams. The action is viewed from behind home plate during at-bats, whether pitching or hitting, then transitions to a top-down view while fielding. Characters are depicted in a super-deformed style featuring enlarged heads, exaggerated facial features, and short and squat character models who react in an over-the-top manner to situations, including literally freezing after striking out or playing dead when hit by a line drive. At-bats are fun and snappy showdowns between pitcher and hitter, with pitchers needing to aim their pitches towards their desired location, while batters need to respond by quickly directing their swing precisely on the ball and timing correctly if they want to make solid contact. Fielding is the gameplay's biggest struggle, with fielders moving in slow, chopping footsteps as they repeatedly chase batted balls all the way to the wall. To make matters worse, control over fielders will automatically switch to the closest defender at any time, causing players to limp in the wrong direction whenever the view abruptly switches. An impressively deep set of roster options includes trading players, training player skills, and creating a player from scratch. The visuals lack detail, particularly in the depictions of the crowd and players in the dugout, which look like nondescript blocks of color that are more geometric than human. The stilted, wooden player animations also sap some of the life out of this title, although these graphical issues are forgivable for an early N64 title. The music in the main menus is energetic and catchy, but a short and grating musical cut plays on a loop during every at-bat, so get used to it! The cute visual style and fun batting and pitching are fun enough to catch the player's attention, but the drudgery of fielding and overall graphical shortcomings will gradually chip away at the appeal.

Reflections: *Chōkūkan Night: Pro Yakyū King* was my introduction to the wild world of Nippon Professional Baseball. As it turns out, NBP was the origination point for Major League Baseball (MLB) stars like Hideo Nomo, Ichiro Suzuki, and Yu Darvish. There's a passionate culture that exists around Japanese baseball, which makes MLB fan culture look dull by comparison. NBP fans go so far as to organically develop individualized cheers for each player and chant them whenever that player steps up to the plate. Learning about NBP through *Chōkūkan Night* was a blast, though my experience with the game itself was more mixed. – JM

Chōkūkan Night: Pro Yakyū King 2

[Hyperspace Night: Pro Baseball King 2]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Genki
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆

Swing for the fences with real-life Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) stars! The core baseball action of this sports title features at-bats viewed from a perspective behind home plate for both pitchers and batters, then switches to top-down when the ball is put in play. Hitting and pitching provide most of the fun, with pitchers aiming toward their target and batters needing to quickly line up directly on the ball and swing at the right time if they hope to drive it to the outfield and beyond. Fielding is the gameplay's Achilles' heel, as fielders move at a snail's pace as they chase balls around the field. An impressive suite of roster options allows for trading players, training up favorite NPB players' skills, and creating a custom NPB star player. The title offers a dazzling array of modes to experience, including exhibition games, full seasons with stat tracking, a suite of mini-games such as a home run derby, and the chance to relive great moments in NPB history. There's even an engaging RPG mode that lets players assume the role of a high school prospect hoping to make it to the big leagues. Here, the player can customize their character's appearance and skills and then make decisions that influence their destination and performance on the diamond. A cutesy super-deformed style is utilized for the graphics, featuring over-large heads, exaggerated facial expressions, and stubby character models, with a wide variety of real-life and fantastical stadiums to choose from (at the beach, in space, on a frozen field). While the models are unique and attention-grabbing, the animations are fairly limited and lifeless. The music is generally good, but there are few tracks to enjoy. The cute visual style, fun at-bats, and impressive modes go a long way, but the plodding pace of fielding and boring animations drag the title down from true baseball glory.

Reflections: While the exhibition games and season mode of *Pro Yakyū King 2* are easy enough to jump into, two modes, in particular, require some substantial ability to read Japanese to enjoy to the fullest – RPG mode and the option to jump into great moments in NPB history. Modes like this are pretty rare in sports games of any flavor, especially during the N64 era. I thought it was impressive that this title included those alongside a suite of standard baseball modes. They were fantastic diversions from the main action but not so different that they felt out of place. – JM

Chopper Attack

Wild Choppers (JP)
Genre: Flight Combat
Release Date: June 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: SETA
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), SETA (JP), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

Relive some 1980s-style action with helicopter combat battling through seven stages with varied missions such as rescuing POWs, destroying all enemy presence in the area, or keeping the president's aircraft safe. Once the player has selected a pilot with their unique helicopter – like the American Mike with the default "all-arounder" chopper or Emma who starts with stronger machine guns – they are briefed by a ranking officer before he sends them off with a gung-ho one-liner such as "Be a wild man!" OK! The first third-person mission starts the player with $100,000 to purchase an arsenal for the current objective. While players have unlimited machine gun ammo, they can purchase various homing missiles, cluster bombs, line rockets, and dummies to aid any play style. The controls are fairly intuitive and offer the option of left-handed controls, which is rare to see even today. Within each stage, shoot structures to reveal health pickups for shields, fuel (which must be maintained or else players crash), bonus money, or strength power-ups that increase the machine gun firepower up to four shots. The better the performance rating at the end of a mission by destroying enemies, conserving ammo, rescuing POWs, and maintaining shields, the more money carried forward for purchasing an arsenal for future missions. In short, to purchase more high-cost homing missiles, players must end missions with higher scores to earn more money. Blasting tanks, helicopters, stealth fighters, and even Rambo-like soldiers that leap up and grab the copter feels good for the most part. However, be ready for some tough walls around the 4th and 5th missions where compensating for the slippery aiming has stopped, and enemies are constantly blindsiding, seemingly leaping out of nowhere from the muddy-looking polygonal environments. Locking on with missiles doesn't feel as satisfying as it should, leading to the best option being to strafe around while firing the machine guns. The most frustrating aspect is that enemy choppers can perform maneuvers that players cannot, essentially making loops around them while trying to reorient themselves. Overall, there are a few cheap thrills, but they are over quickly, much like the '80s action films this title is riffing on.

Reflections: There is a lot of '80s B-movie nonsense (bonus alien mission included) to give life to an otherwise stale action title, but remove the cheese, and *Chopper Attack* is just a mess to look at. The novelty wears thin almost immediately, right around when the difficulty spikes into unfair territory. For instance, at the end of a gauntlet of machine gun turrets, you suddenly get bombarded by a superweapon capable of firing homing missile after homing missile, literally right as you turn a corner. There is some arcade-style fun to be had, but not much to keep you around. – CPr

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Wild Choppers

Choro Q 64 2: Hachamecha Grand Prix Race

[Choro Q 64 2: Chaotic Grand Prix Race]
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Locomotive
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

This cartoony, super-deformed racing title has the players competing to earn new car parts and win the Grand Prix. Race against computer opponents and each other in three different modes in a third or first-person perspective. Choose from a single race for up to two players, drive alone in a time trial, compete in a Grand Prix of three courses, or get up to four players to participate in a Vs. Race. Nine courses are divided into three Grand Prix cups of increasing difficulty: Toy Box Cup, Treasure Chest Cup, and Choro Q Cup. A robust course builder mode is also included, allowing players to create their own tracks and save one of them to a Controller Pak for use in Single Race, Vs. Race, or Time Trial modes. Cars can be customized with parts earned by placing in the top three in races and stealing an item from the bottom three finishers. These parts include Engines, Tires, Brakes & Steering, Reinforcement, and Decoration. Each type of part affects a specific aspect of the car's racing performance, and the parts themselves offer radically different options, such as spiked tires providing the best grip on ice tracks or the Surfboard decoration increasing water resistance by 10%. Many of these parts can be leveled up to increase their effectiveness. Also available are Special Parts, including weapons like the spiked-ball-firing cannon or explosive missiles that offer more devastating attacks as they advance. Players will also find parts on tracks in the form of coins that enable abilities (often ones that are most useful for the track at hand), such as four-wheel-drive tires on off-road courses. Players can even use a copy of *Choro Q Hyper Customable GB* for Game Boy Color and their Transfer Pak for an extra boost to max speed. The graphics reflect the toy cars this title is based on very well, and the tracks are colorful if a little lacking in interesting design choices. Overall, this is an enjoyable but ultimately forgettable racer that provides some limited amusement for a short time.

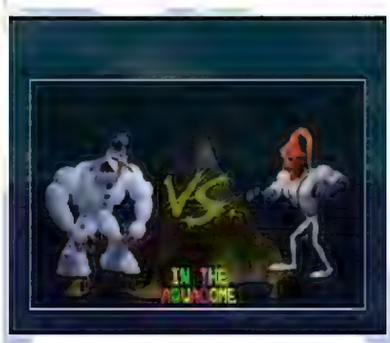
Reflections: I was aware of the racing title *Penny Racers* (*Choro Q 64* in Japan) but had never really given it much of a chance. Playing through its Japanese sequel offers a modicum of fun in zipping around with cute toylike cars, spinning and tumbling through turns. That tracks since *Choro Q 64 2* and its prequel are based upon the Takara-created line of pullback toy cars of the same name, with over 25 Choro Q games in total having been released. There is some enjoyment to be squeezed out of this title for those who want something a little different than the more robust *Mario Kart 64* or *Diddy Kong Racing*. The confusion coin that reverses the controls of the lead car is an especially nice touch compared to the infamous Blue Shell. Ultimately, though, the graphics are subpar, the races bland, and the part collecting is simply not enough to entice extra playtime. – CW

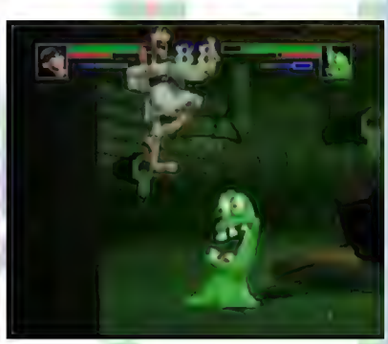
Clay Fighter 63⅓

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Interplay Productions
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

After bouts of circus silliness and urban grittiness, the 2D-fighting goo crew returns to foil the mad Dr. Kiln, a scientist devising a worldwide clay-tastrophe. The backstory is a goofy excuse to animate clay figures across the eclectic Klaymodo Island, a veritable hodgepodge of outlandish locales, such as a snowman's wonderland, a bunny's jungle encampment, and a phantom's ghastly graveyard. The ungainly three – Bad Mr. Frosty, T-Hoppy, and IckyBod Clay, of the previously mentioned settings – share the roster with nine other sketchy contestants (three of which must be unlocked). Examples include Kung Pow (a toothy Kung-Fu master), Harry Houngan (an unscrupulous Voodoo doctor), and Sumo Santa (a fat and flatulent mockery of the genuine article). The fighting system makes a better impression than the forcibly quirky lineup, stuffing its cast with numerous techniques and fanciful attacks. Each character packs a basic three-punch, three-kick move set of variable strength and speed. Once coupled with the appropriate directional commands, these inputs can enact a slew of special moves, from Blob's screen-clearing buzzsaw to Earthworm Jim unleashing his iconic blaster. Super special moves are also available once the accompanying meter is sufficiently filled, allowing characters to launch spasmodic, multiple-hit combos against their doughy opposition. That is just for starters. Success on the higher difficulties requires mastering parrying and side-stepping systems, the stamina meter, throws and combo-breakers, and even Claytalities (finishing moves). Do not expect much guidance from the manual, either; players are largely on their own to deconstruct what is both an odd and overwrought production. In its favor, the art and audio are genuinely good, with the iconic Michael Buffer playing announcer and lending some much-needed energy to the proceedings. Environments are impressively large, with fully navigable and interactive surroundings to transition through in each arena. For instance, uppercutting over particular doors shifts the fight to a new room. There are some mild chuckles with the absurdity of situations like a snowman knocking the head off a clown. Unfortunately, stodgy characters and over-baked gameplay stifle the overall affair. One might say it is a glossy clay pot cracked right down the middle.

Reflections: Parodies rarely equal their source material, and *Clay Fighter*, for all its handcrafted pomp, never quite finds definition. Is it more a circus freakshow designed for quick amusement or a sophisticated fighter requiring serious sweat to enjoy thoroughly? Ultimately, it goes for both, combining absurdist whimsy with the hardcore goals of *Killer Instinct* and similar games. In other words, it wants to have its clay and eat it, too. – DA





European Cartridge

Clay Fighter: Sculptor's Cut

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: May 1998
Region: NA
Developer: Interplay Productions
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: None
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆

This 2D fighter utilizes clay models as playable characters and pits them against each other as they work to overthrow a mad scientist intent on destroying their home on the isle of Claymodo. This direct update to *Clay Fighter 63⅓* keeps most of the core mechanics intact while remixing menus, tweaking certain gameplay features, and increasing the roster size. The fighting fundamentals are easy to grasp: each walking clay concoction packs a dynamic three-punch, three-kick move set based on wobbly, fair, and brutal tiers of strength and speed – weak, medium, and strong, respectively. For better or worse, the ability to combo is limited to special moves and spammed normal attacks, so there is not much depth to it, but it can be entertaining to see how far the combos can go. Characters are varied and unique, including Blob, the morphing gloop, the mad scientist Dr. Kiln with a machine-gun hand; Lady Liberty, representing America by bludgeoning opponents with her torch; and Lockjaw, a cantankerous canine that snaps combatants in half with his gargantuan maw. The main mode has each fighter playing against every other character until they reach their end boss, which is different for everybody. For example, Frosty works his way up to the other winter giant, Sumo Santa, and T.Hoppy faces off against Lady Liberty. The fighting arenas occur across Claymodo, from the seaside Aquadome to the military outpost Camp Claynaveral. Locations are interactive through actions taken while fighting. For instance, slamming an opponent down on a bridge transports the characters to a new arena room. An ostentatious artistic direction offers expressive graphics counterbalanced by underwhelming, almost choppy animations. A wacky, fully-voiced musical number opens the proceedings and properly sets the mood for a game that takes nothing seriously. Multiplayer options are stunted, providing a limited multiplayer experience that does not go beyond simple one-on-one bouts. The end result is a game that feels like someone took it out of the kiln too early.

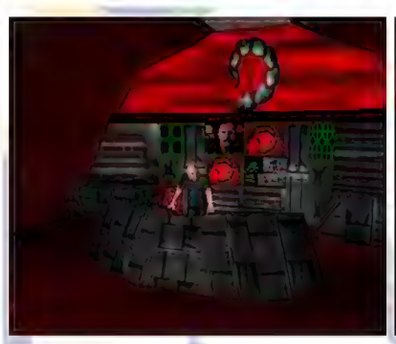
Reflections: Reworked and reimagined up to the 11th hour of its oft-delayed release, the version of *Clay Fighter 63⅓* that shipped was very different from the one originally planned. The arenas were supposed to be 2D, clay-sculpted masterpieces; the final version replaced them with bland polygonal landscapes. Five characters were also snipped from the roster at the last minute, although there are still four additions: Lady Liberty, Lockjaw, Zappa Yow Yow Boyz, and High Five. Changes like these came in such abundance that strategy guides became instantly obsolete by the time of publication. *Sculptor's Cut*, a Blockbuster Video rental exclusive, was Interplay's attempt at redemption, a "patch" to save the franchise. There has yet to be another sequel. – DA

Command & Conquer

Genre: Real-Time Strategy
Release Date: June 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Westwood Studios
Ported by: Looking Glass Studios
Publisher: Nintendo
Number of Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

The discovery of Tiberium, a mysterious crystalline element found in the wake of a meteor, sparks war on a global scale. This top-down, real-time strategy game is set in an alternate universe and has players take the role of either the Global Defense Initiative (GDI) or the Brotherhood of Nod. Players must meet each map's mission's objectives, ranging from eliminating enemy forces to strategic rescue or escorting important units. Using the point-and-click interface, they must also balance base and force construction, command their units to move or attack, and harvest Tiberium fields to acquire more funds. Not all missions allow construction, compelling the player to manage limited forces carefully to accomplish their assigned task. Each faction's campaign has unique locations and mission variants that, once reached, can be replayed at any time. Later missions feature more units and buildings, such as the minimap-enabling Comm Center and the devastating Ion Cannon. In addition to the two campaigns, a Special Ops mode offers four extra missions, two for each faction. Frank Klepacki's brilliant musical compositions still rock, even as sequenced audio, but the series' beloved FMV is swapped for still images with voice-overs. Micromanaging units can prove tricky with limited buttons on the controller. However, the ability to map groups of units to C-buttons helps both in tactical velocity and as a handy way to move the camera to them. Mastering the back-and-forth of base construction and force movements is the key to success. The voiced briefings may not always clarify mission parameters, but the Pause menu allows players to review objectives. Some performance drag and inefficiencies in input can grate over time, but this strategy staple is worth its weight in Tiberium.

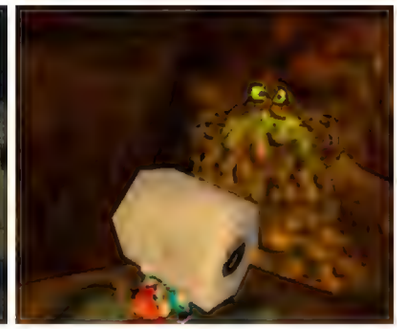
Reflections: Often referred to by its working title, *Tiberium Dawn*, this entry kicked off the Command & Conquer series in 1995, an influential property in the real-time strategy genre. The N64 port came years later, a little after EA had acquired Westwood from its former publisher, Virgin Interactive. Looking Glass had several hits to their name, including the *Thief* and *System Shock* titles, and certainly had 3D experience. The clever interplay of sprites and polygonal assets is largely seamless. However, all that work doesn't add much to the experience and sometimes proves taxing on the hardware. Too many units or explosions on-screen at once noticeably drag down the frame rate. Noticeably missing from the N64 version – the expansion's dinosaurs, playfully riffed as "Removed: House JP" in the scramble of text during the intro, a callback to both *Dune II* and *Jurassic Park*. – DG



European Cartridge

Conker's Bad Fur Day

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 2001
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Rareware (NA, AU), THQ (EU)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆



A squirrel with a hangover wanders out of the pub one night, stumbling into a series of bizarre events that eventually make him king of all the land. This raunchy 3D platformer follows Conker the squirrel from a third-person perspective as he hops across fair meadows, swims through sewage, solves puzzles in a prehistoric nightclub, and gets into a machine gun shooting match with evil teddy bears. Levels are linked from a central hub world with entrances blocked by organic obstacles (giant boulders, barbed wire, snarling earthworms). Enter the stage, work through its chapters, and then return to the hub to find one of those obstacles removed, opening the way to the next level. Conker has a simple jump augmented by a tail-spinning hovering ability. His only attack is a frying pan that can thwack foes and certain NPCs to stun them temporarily. The really interesting actions come from special context-sensitive platforms scattered throughout the game. Stand on one, and Conker can perform an action that, coincidentally, perfectly suits his situation. Are big bugs being bothersome? A slingshot will help splat them. Fighting a singing mountain of poo? Context-sensitive buttons provide toilet paper. These situations add incredible variety to the core platforming action, as players never know what the next button will deliver or how to use it to escape a predicament. Puzzles are usually easy to figure out but challenging to solve, ensuring the design always leans heavily on its platforming roots. Feeding a farting mouse, for example, means smacking bouncing cheese wedges to stun them, then finding a way to carry them safely across the stage without jumping; a true exercise in patience, timing, and luck.

Most of the adventure is hopping, thwacking, and puzzle-solving, but Conker will also pilot tanks, ride rolling barrels, man turrets, bribe scarecrows, and transform into a free-flying, free-pooping bat. Parodies are a big part of the experience, including sections that riff on The Matrix, Saving Private Ryan, Alien, and more. Players can also indulge in split-screen multiplayer matches for up to four people. These include deathmatch, heist, racing, and capture the flag modes, but they also get to blast helpless peasants in a beach siege and play as cavemen or dinosaurs in a team-based egg-stealing competition. The juvenile but self-aware humor is both a high and a low point. When a bee suggestively "pollinates" a big-bosomed sunflower, Conker's wide-eyed expression of horror mixed with curiosity perfectly illustrates the bawdy but comical mood. Later, Conker downs a load of booze, kicking off a drunken mini-game where he controls his urine stream to douse flames on burning imps. Moments like these are funny and surprising (and usually fun to play), but they don't have much lasting appeal beyond the initial shock value. Apart from this, Conker's adventures are unpredictable and entertaining in all the right ways. Underneath its cutesy exterior, a plethora of potty jokes, and an eyebrow-raising amount of blood and violence is an incredibly well-made title down to the smallest of details, and it is an absolute joy to experience.

Reflections: *Conker's Bad Fur Day* is the second of only three Conker-branded games ever released. The franchise started with 1999's *Conker's Pocket Tales*, an action-adventure title for Game Boy Color that's cute but not crude. *Bad Fur Day* began as a similarly sugary action-platformer, but the adorable look was poorly received during its unveiling. The team redesigned the title for mature audiences, creating the grotesque joke-fest we have today. In 2005 *Conker's Bad Fur Day* was remade for Xbox as *Conker: Live and Reloaded*, adding a new multiplayer mode, better visuals, and, bizarrely, some censorship, including bleeping out portions of The Great Mighty Poo's breathtaking aria. After this release, Conker essentially retired, appearing in only one cameo in the short-lived *Project Spark*. *Conker's Bad Fur Day* got people's attention thanks to its sense of humor, and it's still remembered for the same reason. However, the humor casts a shadow over the impeccable level design, writing, artwork, musical score, and puzzles. *Bad Fur Day* is good enough to sit on the top shelf next to the best 3D console platformers, no matter how many decapitated peasants and caveman arses it shows. – JBa

European Cartridge

Cruis'n Exotica

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Midway Games
Ported by: Gratuitous Games
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

This "exotic" third installment of the over-the-top arcade racing series takes drivers to a dozen different locales, including the surface of Mars! After selecting one of six drivers, auto or manual transmission (manual has higher top speed), and an automobile, players cruise through Exotica mode with its mix of time-based, checkpoint, and rally races. The third-/first-person races test a player's penchant for speed. Driving feels smooth, and there is not much required to get ahead in places like the mountains of Tibet besides flooring it and being able to tightly corner. Tricks like double-tapping the gas can result in some time-saving/extending by popping a wheelie underwater in Atlantis, turning on two wheels in the streets of Hong Kong, or performing a flipping jump over a volcano in Vegas. However, not making significant driving errors once ahead is the best bet to finish first and move on. There are a dozen default vehicles, including sportscars, a solar car, a surf wagon, a buggy, a truck, police cars, and more. While each racer has different stats, such as traction/handling and mass, choosing one with good acceleration and top speed is of utmost importance. If not out in front of the pack soon after a race begins, a driver may find themselves in a "bumper car" war against their opponents. The narrow courses do not allow many passing opportunities when clogged (even the Wideload big rig cannot easily knock others out of the way). Courses boast lovely scenery – it is fun to see giant whales jump out of the water in snowy Alaska or dinosaurs stomping around the Amazon – and the alternate paths and shortcuts keep things interesting. However, lousy texture pop-in is frustrating since it can be tough to see which way the road bends in time to react.

Some replayability is here by earning "miles" to unlock 16 additional vehicles such as a forklift, Ford Model T, Formula 1 racer, and more. Challenge mode enables racing any locale in two smaller courses, a circuit lap race or a drag race, where the player can earn nitro boosts. While this and the practice Freestyle mode are nice, the racing mechanics are not deep or fun enough to warrant a serious grind. Like the handful of mediocre music tracks featured, this vehicle is adequate but underperforms.

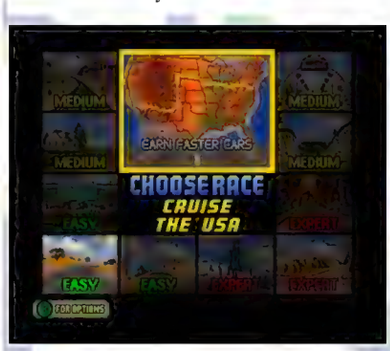
Reflections: This disappointing conclusion to the original arcade and N64 trilogy surprised me with its lack of inventiveness. It took a significant step back by eliminating much of the technical racing that helped make *Cruis'n World* a marked improvement over *Cruis'n USA*. While the different locations can be nice to behold, it's too simple a racing experience, and the wear on the franchise's tires is beginning to show. *Cruis'n Exotica* would be the last game in the arcade series until *Cruis'n Blast* from Raw Thrills revved up arcades again in 2017. – PC

Cruis'n USA

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Manufacturing
Ported by: Williams Entertainment
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆

Speed across the USA in this port of the arcade racing machine. Players can choose single courses, such as Death Valley or Appalachia, or they can cruise the USA in 14 circuit courses from San Francisco to Washington, DC. Two muscle and two sports cars are available, each differing in acceleration, top speed, handling, and power; an automatic transmission or a higher maximum speed manual transmission is available. On the two and four-lane highway races, players have to rush to hit multiple checkpoints in the allotted time before reaching the finish line. A first-person and two third-person views are available while cornering and swerving to avoid traffic, and a handful of selectable forgettable tunes are on hand to add to driving pleasure. The driving strategy is simple: dash as fast as possible while dodging the nine competitors, avoiding crashing, and swerving around cartoony car accidents that can clutter the road. Besides braking to take steep curves, keeping the pedal to the metal at speeds up to 150 mph while carefully maneuvering between cars and buses is the path to success. Unfortunately, there is not much interaction in the course design, save for support columns from tunnels and the "L" train in Chicago to avoid. However, outrunning a train in Arizona is a rush. The stages themselves have different scenery, but they graphically repeat too often, and some assets are reused between stages. Still, it is a nice representation of the varied national landscape, like the towering trees of the Redwood Forest or the cornfields of Iowa. Car upgrades are available upon completing the full circuit, and there are three hidden bonus vehicles available at the start (school bus, police cruiser, jeep), although replayability is not a strong point. Arcade racing fans may want to burn a little rubber, but mileage will vary.

Reflections: An early N64 release, *Cruis'n USA* first hit arcades in 1994, featuring a sit-down version where up to four machines could link up for multiplayer action. The arcade game was initially advertised at the 1994 Consumer Electronics Show as running on Ultra 64 (Nintendo 64) hardware, but it was running on Midway arcade hardware. Due to this, the home version had to suffer a graphical and technical downgrade to run on the N64. Besides this, animals were no longer around on the home version to run into, although flies could still smash into your windshield while driving in first-person view on a few stages. Also removed was an ending scene on top of the White House featuring President Bill Clinton sharing a hot tub tryst with a bikini-clad Hillary and another woman. – PC



European Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

Cruis'n World

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Games
Ported by: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

The world race awaits in this sequel to *Cruis'n USA*. Choose from one of a dozen blistering-fast vehicles and dash around the globe in a selectable third- or first-person view. Peel out on the Great Wall of China in the Orca sports car, speed through Moscow past a nuclear power plant in the El Niño muscle car, zoom through English fields in the Rhino 4x4, and more! The namesake Cruis'n World mode starts in Hawaii to complete 14 international stages to reach Cape Canaveral, Florida, and perhaps even the moon. After choosing automatic or manual transmission and preferred automobile (with varying acceleration, top speed, handling, and power), the race goal is to hit checkpoints in the allotted time and reach the finish line in at least third place to move on. Of course, this means contending with nine other globe-trotting racers along with traffic, but a road minimap is helpful. Naturally, the arcade-style rally racing leans heavily on speed (pop a wheelie by double-tapping the gas!). Still, the ability to brake drift on turns and do side wheelies can help navigate curves and maintain a higher speed, and pulling off trick jumps can add precious seconds. The stages are well-represented vistas, like the Australian outback with bouncing kangaroos or quaint villages lining the scenic German countryside. Most races provide unique multicultural music track stylings, such as French house or a Kenyan tribal beat. While the music can entertain, the challenge may frustrate even on lower difficulties since the computer AI is relentless, making a multi-car crash almost necessary to make up ground if lagging behind. This pain is exacerbated in the lap-based Championship mode, where even minor misdriving can result in a loss, with the three provided nitro boosts not helping much. However, Championship provides replay value by earning points via placing first through third and performing tricks, which can garner bonus vehicles, like an NYC taxi or an ambulance. While not deep, there may be enough oddball speed to keep up to four players entertained on this global highway, so do not forget a passport.

Reflections: *Cruis'n World* was a marked improvement over its predecessor *Cruis'n USA* in the arcades, but even more so on the N64. Since *USA* was admittedly not a great port, Eurocom spent extra time and care to ensure that *World* was much closer to its arcade roots. *Cruis'n USA* did not have the best frame rate and wasn't the smoothest game to behold, so the improved sense of speed is very welcome. Almost as welcomed is the zaniness factor, which has been taken up a notch from the prequel. While *Cruis'n USA* was cartoonishly comical, *Cruis'n World* ups the ante with fluffiness, like alien UFOs invading at Stonehenge. – PC

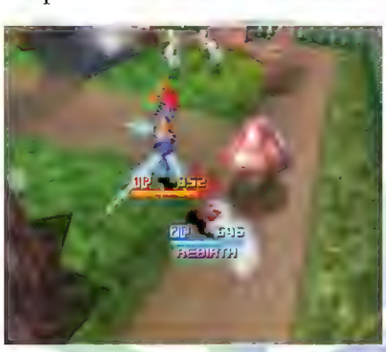
European Cartridge

Custom Robo

Genre: Action-RPG, Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Noise
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save
Japanese Required: High
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

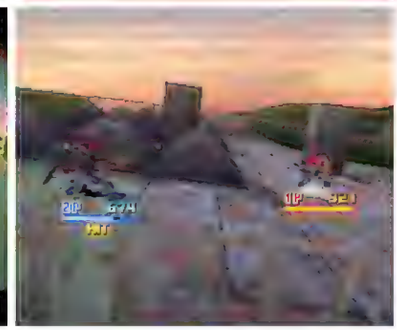
In this third-person RPG of metal-mashing mayhem, battle through tournaments with customizable robots to become the greatest robo commander. The player's character has moved to a new town with his parents and is given his own Custom Robo to compete with friends and rivals in battles for dominance. Travel to locations such as the Robo Center, the Park, and other mini-environments, where numerous eager opponents await their chance to scrap. Fight in battles using the robo's gun, bombs, and "pods" (launchable mini-drones.) Battles begin by launching the robo as a die from one of two aimed cannon arms of a robot, which will land in the arena on one of several symbols that dictate how the robo unpacks itself for combat. It is possible for a robo to start on its feet, on its side, or even standing on its head, each of which can cost precious time to orient for battle. The battles themselves are fast and frenetic, as each robo fires off bombs that arc through the air to a targeted destination, pods that can slightly navigate the level's obstacles, and the gun, which whittles the opponent's life down in a hail of energy bullets. Robos also have a dashing melee attack that is very useful at close range. Whenever a robo takes enough damage, it is knocked down but is invincible for a short time once it stands back up. The first one to run out of health loses. Before beginning a battle, the player can swap any components on their robo for different ones and enter into practice mode to get a feel for the setup. For example, combine the three-way gun with a bomb that curves around objects and a fast-moving pod, or try out the Gatling gun with a standard bomb. In many battles, when defeating an opponent, the player can download the data from their robo and can fabricate parts to power up their own robo – it is critical to do this to advance, or higher-skilled opponents will steamroll the player later on. The RPG story elements here, delivered through in-game dialogue, provide a decent reason to string the battles together. The holographic arenas are designed with dynamic (and occasionally destructible) scenery and unique obstacles or paths. A rather anemic two-player battle mode is included for those who want a quick battle. Persistent players will find this a fun bot-smashing experience well worth a playthrough.

Reflections: Echoes of Pokémon permeate *Custom Robo* for me. A young character sets out into the world to become a master battler, not of hundreds of captured wild animals but of powerful toy robots that battle in small holographic arenas instead. The gameplay reminds me somewhat of arena fighting titles like *Power Stone*, with simplified move sets that perfectly fit the toy aesthetic. *Custom Robo* could have benefitted from more robust multiplayer battling, but as a single-player experience, it is fun and easy enough to pick up and play, and it left me wanting more. – CW



Custom Robo V2

Genre: Action-RPG, Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Noise
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (2 simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

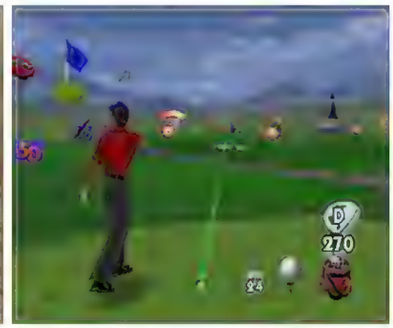


This robot-bashing third-person action-RPG tells the story of a young transfer student in a small town who received his very first Custom Robo to participate in his society's miniature robot battling obsession. Many locations in this town have some Custom Robo battling decks, the tiny arenas where the robots duke it out. These are filled with opponents eager to face off against him. Defeating enemies can earn the player data to fabricate new and better parts for their own Robo, which are then fabricated into usable parts at a handy vending machine. Customization is the name of the game, and if players do not build a stock of parts and learn their abilities, they may find themselves getting stomped by later opponents. At the start of each battle, there is an opportunity to swap these components to gain an advantage based on what parts the opponent is using. Switching bombs to one with greater damage but a smaller area of effect, trading out standard pod drones for ones that move faster but are less accurate in seeking the enemy, or swapping the standard gun for a spread shot can all be viable strategies depending upon the player's style. The Robo, contained in its compact cube, is launched into the arena in a chosen direction from a special launcher and lands on one of several symbols that indicate how it will unpack itself. If it lands on its feet, it unpacks the fastest, and on its head, the slowest. Once unpacked, the robots jump, dash, smash, and blast their way around the small square arenas until one runs out of health. The experience features RPG story elements with interesting character portraits giving both friends and adversaries an appealing look. Once the player goes through the tutorial, the versus-battle modes are unlocked, allowing for one-on-one fighting or tag-team matches, including up to four alternating players on unlockable arenas in interesting settings, such as atop a plane mid-flight, in a volcano with damaging lava at the center, and beachfront areas. Enjoyable and lighthearted, this is one robot smasher worth checking out.

Reflections: *Custom Robo V2* offers what a good sequel should be: more of what made the first game great, with some meaningful refinements where needed. In this case, the four-player combat mode is a welcome addition despite its tag-team nature. It certainly would have been a great deal of fun to have a four-way destruction derby in some of the unlockable location maps. Throwing someone into the lava and watching them launch high into the air while getting blasted from three other players' guns at once would be a delight. – CW

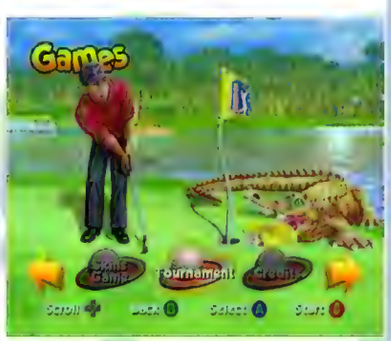
CyberTiger

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Saffire
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4, 2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆



What does it take to be a golfing great? Find out by teeing off against professional powerhouses Tiger Woods and Mark O'Meara. The 3D third-person golfing action is a fun blend of realism and cartoonishness, with a zany font design and a brisk pace of hole progression. The control mechanics are, unfortunately, a little awkward, with the player pressing the Control Stick down and then up to simulate pulling a golf club back and then swinging forward. There are nine power-ups to collect by hitting targets in the Driving Range practice mode, which carry into the main game. They include a missile for greater distance, a twisty ball for better spin accuracy, and a burrowing ball that opens an underground shortcut. Strangely enough, Woods and O'Meara, along with their teenage selves, are the only real-life pro golfers on the roster, which is disappointing for featuring a PGA license. The courses, characters, and seven playable modes are all fairly barebones. There are only three courses in total (one being a mix of Tournament Players Club holes), and their bland design and lack of terrain variety make them dull to play and completely forgettable. The four-player modes also feel quite the same: Stroke Play, Skins, and the 72-hole marathon Tournament all function under the same standard golf rules, with their scorecards offering only superficial differences. The two-player modes fare a bit better: Match Game does away with traditional scoring in favor of hole-by-hole victories, while Tiger Challenge ups the ante by allowing the winner of each hole to take away one of their opponent's clubs. Perhaps a unique part is Battle Mode, in which opposite-facing players try to knock each other from atop perches with explosive balls. Unfortunately, this mode is a very brief experience. Still, it ultimately serves as an apt illustration of the overall experience: fun, interesting, and exciting, but with far too few ways to experience it and little reason to keep playing once the novelty wears off.

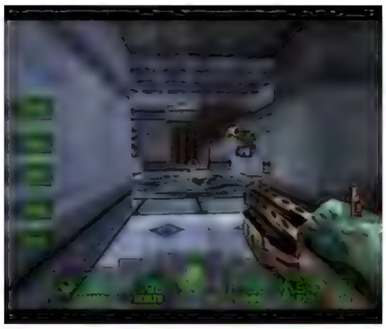
Reflections: *CyberTiger* feels like an effort to make golf palatable to a younger audience. While cartoony visuals and comedic action are an interesting way to present the sport, I think more variety in course design and modes would have ensured a richer experience. Though the game is not necessarily aiming for a simulation feel, modes such as shooting or scramble matches would have offered more tangible ways to experience the action. To this end, it is worth noting that the PlayStation version of *CyberTiger*, while visually inferior, does provide a progression-based career mode, which better entices players to stick with the game for longer than an afternoon. – CP

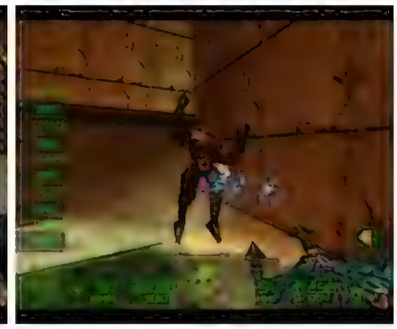


European Cartridge

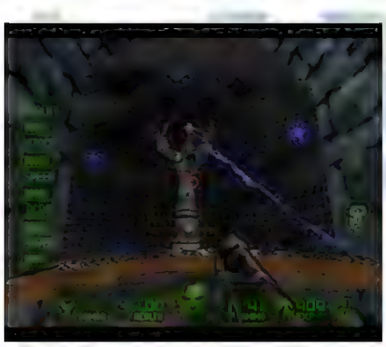
(John Romero's) Daikatana

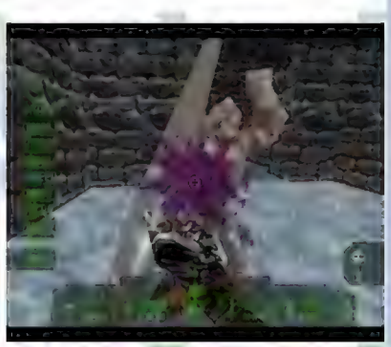
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Ion Storm
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆



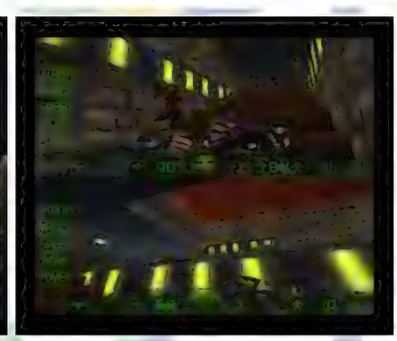


The evil Kage Mishima has seized control of the world using the time-distorting power of the Daikatana, and it is up to Hiro Miyamoto and his partners Mikiko and Superfly Johnson to set the space-time continuum right through 3D first-person shooting hijinx. Hiro's quest takes him through four periods – Japan circa AD 2455, ancient Greece, medieval Norway, and San Francisco circa AD 2030. Each time period offers a unique set of weapons, such as the laser-shooting Ion Blaster of future Japan, Poseidon's Trident from ancient Greece, magic staffs from medieval times, and the Novabeam superweapon from AD 2030. Handling each weapon feels responsive and simple after the opening mission, with aiming done via the Control Stick and movement (including strafing) via the C-buttons. However, cycling through Hiro's arsenal becomes laborious after a few missions as weapons continually stockpile, totaling 24, most with ammo exclusive to their respective time. Thankfully, enemy AI is frightfully stupid, content to walk and fire straight ahead, making circle-strafing the best (and usually only) strategy for handling them, including bosses. As Hiro defeats enemies, he gains experience to level up his defense, firing speed, running speed, jumping height, and attack power. However, the difference in these skill levels is more difficult to notice than enemies are to kill. The bigger distraction is traversing the stages, which can be overly large and confusing without waypoints, a map, or even something to explain mission objectives. Health and armor pickups are plentiful, though, giving some respite to the respawning enemies. Character models match the world (meaning muddy brown and confusing to look at), and even the music gives off the feeling of being bland and moody, setting an overall tone of misplaced seriousness within a world filled with magic, mythology, and a character literally named Superfly. Friends are welcome to join multiplayer deathmatches or gem-hunting contests and may have some silly fun. Ultimately, there is a clear ambition to deliver a fresh and exciting experience. Still, like firing Posideon's Trident at a time-traveling samurai, the result is more weird confusion than stellar execution.





Reflections: The infamous advertisement stated, "John Romero's about to make you his bitch." Expectations were placed unbelievably high during the three-year development cycle, causing much to be reworked again and again from scratch. Ironically, the N64 version of *Daikatana* was saved from the most glaring PC version's problems simply from hardware limitations, forcing devs to scrap the universally panned AI partners. Even stranger, a Game Boy Color version was released only in Japan and Europe, being a top-down dungeon crawler that earned a generally favorable response. There's an odd legacy to wade through, and maybe in another timeline, it really was Romero's masterpiece. Not this one, though. – CPr



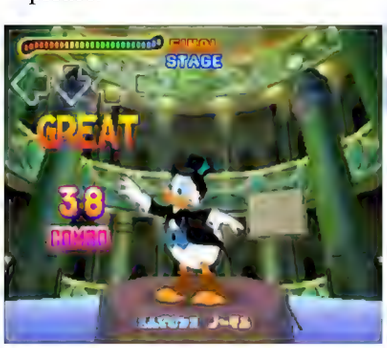
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Dance Dance Revolution Disney Dancing Museum

Genre: Rhythm
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Kobe
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Dance Dance Revolution Controller
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

Join the classic Disney cartoon gang for colorful tunes with this rhythmic dancing experience! Players attempt to time and match directional presses of solid arrows that ascend from the bottom towards outlines of LEFT, DOWN, UP, and RIGHT at the screen's top. This is accomplished with either the D-pad and C-buttons on a controller or by burning some calories using the optional dance pad mat. The roughly 90-second songs are accompanied by nicely animated Disney characters responding and dancing to the tunes, although their moves are not coordinated with the directional arrows. The tracklist contains various solid genre offerings, including rock, classical, electronic, disco, folk, Christmas-themed, world music, and more. Groove with Mickey to the electronic and upbeat "Mickey Mouse March," shake it like Elvis with "Goofy's Rock 'n' Roll Show," or gracefully glide with Daisy Duck ice skating to the classical "Waltz of the Flowers." A starting 10-song selection greets players, with the standard mode allowing a choice of three songs to make a set that results in a letter grade based on the player's performance. Routines range in difficulty on a five-point Mickey-ears scale, which indicates the speed and complexity of patterns, including quicker needed responses and more simultaneous LEFT and RIGHT commands. A scale on top tracks performance. The resulting grade is calculated from how well-timed button presses are in each song (PERFECT, GREAT, GOOD, BOO, MISS) as well as consecutive PERFECT/GREAT responses in a row (COMBO). Session mode offers the same songs with a greater dance difficulty by adding A/B button presses (pad or controller) corresponding to instrument notes or claps. If playing Session on the normal or hard setting, directional puzzle pieces are mixed in with standard arrows. Each PERFECT or GREAT puzzle-piece response results in that piece being added to that song's bonus puzzle. Capturing all results in a viewable puzzle and unlocks one of the extra songs that can be played (12 additional in all). This replayability element is welcome but hampered somewhat by the need to go back out to the start screen and begin the same process over and over again to play three-song sets. Whether taking the easy route with a controller or sweating it out on the dance pad, this collection of boppy tracks coupled with Disney characters is sure to please.



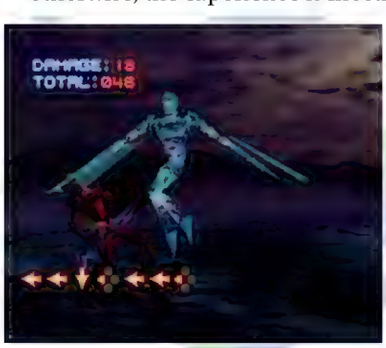
Reflections: Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) is a pioneering rhythmic game franchise that became an absolute sensation in the late 1990s and early 2000s, starting in arcades and invading every major gaming platform. This N64 title was released only in Japan (dance pad sold separately). However, the PlayStation version was released worldwide with an entirely different tracklist with Disney characters DJing instead of dancing. While the N64 had more generic songs and remixed classics, the PlayStation version featured house and techno tracks. Songs like Chubby Checker's "Let's Twist Again" were worldwide tracks, while song covers, such as "Disco Inferno" by The Trammps and "Surfin' U.S.A." by The Beach Boys, were only in the Japanese release. – PC

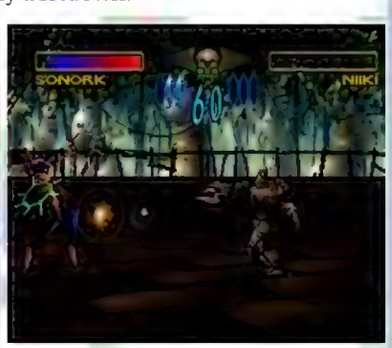
Dance Dance Revolution Controller

Dark Rift

Space Dynamites (JP)
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: July 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Kronos Digital Entertainment
Publisher: Vic Tokai
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

In the far future, a mysterious crystal suddenly appears in space, causing explosions on a massive scale. Warriors from across the universe vie for control over this crystal and the otherworldly power it holds. Take the role of one of these warriors and fight everyone in the way of the crystal, one duel at a time. In this one-versus-one fighting game, fighters move around in 3D arenas, including a military space base and post-apocalyptic junkyard. They use horizontal and vertical attacks, kicks, and throws to reduce their opponent's health to zero. Characters also have a suite of special attacks with catchy names like Hades Bite, Spiral Slice, and Deadly Butterfly, all of which deal extra damage but require pressing a series of buttons to unleash. Sidesteps and jumps add room for defensive strategies, but for the most part, it is all about launching attacks and never letting up. Eight playable warriors fill out the roster, including the energy-alien Morphix, whose arms turn into blades, the demon lord Demonica with a long-range flame breath, and Aaron, the gun-wielding soldier. Beating Tournament mode unlocks two special characters via passwords. Each person has a distinct visual design and fighting style, and their move sets are balanced, so any fighter is a viable choice for victory. Unfortunately, AI opponents are as dumb as bricks, and spamming attacks that keep enemies on lockdown can win most fights. Including a two-player mode somewhat remedies this, but this precludes the whole game experience by avoiding solo play. Each character has a unique ending that can be discovered by beating Tournament mode, although only if played above easy difficulty. Beating Tournament also records a score in the rankings screen. However, with no method of saving, everything is reset on the system powering off, so it is pointless that this even exists. Ultimately, there is some fun to be found with a friend, but otherwise, the experience is mostly a letdown.





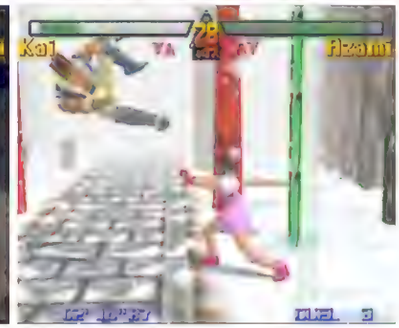
Reflections: Believe it or not, *Dark Rift* was the first N64 release to play at 60 fps. It is a sequel to a Sega Saturn game called *Criticom*, a similarly-styled 3D fighting game. You'd be forgiven for never having heard of either of these games, and you'll be forgiven if you promptly forget about them, too. In Japan, *Dark Rift* goes by the infinitely cooler name *Space Dynamites*, which makes me think that some of that '80s sci-fi shtick was more intentional than I initially gave it credit for. I wish the developers had leaned into that angle and made some fun, silly B-grade space nonsense instead of the dull, self-serious space nonsense they gave us. – RR

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Deadly Arts

G.A.S.P!! Fighters' NEXTream (EU, JP)
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Sept. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆



A group of young warriors from around the planet fights in a tournament to test their street-scrapping prowess. In this 3D side-view polygonal fighter, choose a martial artist and take on the computer in a 1P Battle, three-on-three Team Battle, or challenge a friend in either. Players pick from a crop of eight contenders, including the headbanded hero Kai, the hulking wrestler Kongoh, and Azami, the feisty kung-fu fighter (with mandatory hair buns). Enter the ring and pummel the enemy on the way to a best two-out-of-three win to progress. Defeat every opponent to prove dominance as the best fighter in the world! Combatants punch, kick, and throw their way to victory while stomping on downed opponents for a quick, cheap shot whenever possible. Defensively, blocking and side-stepping are at players' disposal. No magical moves are to be found, just standard standing, jumping, and crouching punches, kicks, and combos. Each character does have special attacks, like Kyoya's Power Hook unleashed by tapping Back, Forward, and Punch. Points are earned by using and correctly timing specific attacks against the enemy. Any round not ended by a decisive K.O. is determined by assessing each fighter's score. The locations for fights are unimaginative: a warehouse, a Japanese garden, and an industrial rooftop, to name a few. However, wall jumping and environmental objects is a plus. One standout feature is the option to create a unique warrior, pitting them against various opponents and earning additional fighting moves as victories are accrued. These are usually just slightly fancier kicks or punches involving a spin or flip of some kind. Graphically, a Rubik's Cube would call these character models blocky, and the background environments are washed out. The camera trucks in and out incessantly during the action, which can be extremely distracting. Only the most avid fighting game devotees will persevere long enough to make it to the end of this adventure. It is a shame because the final bosses are unique and interesting, contrasting sharply with almost every other aspect.

Reflections: *Deadly Arts* seems to have been modeled entirely upon fighting game tropes (and from *Tekken* in terms of some mechanics and tone), from the clichéd characters to the predictable stages and uninspired moves. We've seen it all before, and it would be almost forgivable if the game itself were interesting. The sluggish response to button inputs and the molasses-slow feedback really does make fighting cumbersome. Every punch, kick, and block feels delayed. I suppose "deadly" would be an apt description, as mashing the buttons in a futile attempt to get results could certainly be deadly to your struggling fingers. Given the poor graphics, they were reaching a little bit with the whole "arts" thing, too. – DM

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Densha de Go! 64

[Let's Go by Train! 64]
Genre: Simulation
Release Date: July 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Taito
Publisher: Taito
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Densha de Go! Controller, VRS (optional)
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

Climb into the locomotive booth and weave through 16 missions across seven main lines via 13 different trains in this detailed simulation game. Action is from the train driver's perspective as the train travels down real-world tracks. While driving, it is best to adhere to strict on-screen scheduled stops and speed limits to maximize the score; this often means traveling slower than the train's capability and stopping at the proper point at a station. The player will start with 30 extra time units that function as a life bar equivalent, with units deducted for arriving late to stations, exceeding the speed limit, and other infractions. Completing stages awards bronze, silver, and gold medals, unlocking more stages. The D-pad controls acceleration, while the A and B buttons handle the pressure of the brakes. The C-buttons are devoted to honking the train's horn. Honking when appropriate, like to warn workers on a track or when seeing wildlife, results in extra time. Players can optionally use the VRS (Japanese VRU) and microphone to announce stops or directions to passengers for a small time bonus. An special train controller mimicks the layout of a train driver's cab, functioning as a realistic but entirely optional N64 controller replacement. Most of the time playing will be spent in the main Arcade mode, though an optional Beginner's mode runs new operators through the basic mechanics in less than 10 minutes. Managing a train into a station exactly on schedule is incredibly satisfying, but there isn't much depth or variety to be found beyond that. Landscapes and scenery are true to the real-life details of the lines, which adds some charm, as do amusing graphics when missing a stop or improperly using the emergency brake. There is no musical theme during gameplay, but the sharp sound effects set a pleasant atmosphere. This quirky passenger-rail sim won't pull a huge crowd, but its one-of-a-kind style and gameplay should win over plenty of passengers.

Reflections: Train simulations are one of those "Big in Japan" things, along with horse racing, Spinal Tap, and mahjong. However, *Densha de Go! 64* has a sort of fun tension that still makes it fun to play for just about anyone. Originally an arcade game (*Densha de Go! 2 Kōsoku-hen*) with an elaborate cabinet, this series has spanned over a dozen editions up to modern times. A fan translation for the N64 version exists and even switches the voice recognition to English. If sticking to schedules and precisely stopping in front of actual stations even remotely appeals to you, I recommend hunting down a copy of this unique game and even the train controller for the full engineer experience. – SG

***Densha de Go! 64* Controller**

Derby Stallion 64

Genre: Simulation, Sports
Release Date: Aug. 2001
Region: JP
Developer: ParityBit
Publisher: Media Factory
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆

Buy the farm – literally – in this horse racing simulator, released only in Japan. The main mode centers on menu-based horse management: buying, selling, breeding, and entering them into races. Races are presented in 3D, as is an overhead view of the stables; the remainder of the action is in 2D menu screens. There isn't direct control over the racehorses, so careful training is the only way to succeed. Yen can be earned by cautious betting, whether an owned horse is in a particular race or not. Better horses produce better offspring and sell for a higher price. Acquire new mares and younglings at auctions held at regular intervals. Information screens keep track of horse bloodlines, racing performance, and current market prices, all of which contribute to success. The overarching goal is to ascend to the top racing circuit by acquiring or breeding the best horses and largest farms. This leans more toward a financial experience that takes trial and error to learn the systems instead of a pure horse racing game. Outside of the career mode, an exhibition racing mode allows players to pit horses from different save files against one another. A Controller Pak may allow horses to "visit" another stable (a friend's cartridge copy) by an import function. Fluid horse animations and course designs look impressive for the system, with a mock television-style camera tracking the action and an announcer providing text-based commentary. The music is also a positive factor, with a breezy, melodic score that alternates with a more energetic theme on racing days – only the sound effects from the cheering crowd remain. Both horses and the player's avatar can be customized with blankets and outfits of different colors. Because of the menu-driven and text-based nature of the gameplay, this intricate management simulation of the horse racing industry may not appeal to everyone. However, for those who enjoy more methodical management games, it's exactly their breed of fun.

Reflections: *Derby Stallion 64* has similarities to PC sports management series *Baseball Mogul* and *Out of the Park*, simulations like Koei's *Aerobiz* for SNES, and *Final Fantasy VII*'s chocobo breeding mini-game on PlayStation. The series is quite popular in Japan, selling more than five million copies across 24 games, from 1991's Famicom debut to a 2020 game for the Switch. The N64 installment was the 16th of the series and the second to last Japanese release for the N64. There was a licensed strategy guide made for serious equestrian enthusiasts, too. Interestingly, this started as a 64DD project in 1997, with plans for a link cable to allow secret multiplayer betting via Game Boy and Transfer Pak compatibility for mobile management. A trailer for the GameCube port aired at Nintendo's Space World in 2000, but this was released instead. – SG

Destruction Derby 64

Genre: Vehicular Combat, Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Looking Glass Studios
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

Buckle up with gritted teeth for three styles of monotonous first or third-person 3D vehicular mayhem. Destruction race and destruction derby modes feature the demolishing of 11 CPU-controlled cars (or up to three friends in multiplayer) to achieve the highest possible point score. Time trials allow solo attempts to break three-lap course records on eight bare-bones stock car-style circuits, including Midnyte Rumble through a nighttime cityscape and the French Riviera-esque setting of Seascape Sprint. Races, which make up the bulk of the content, are timed, so drivers must keep moving to cause collisions or hit checkpoints. Due to excessive caution from the CPU-controlled opponents, races usually morph into dull, low-speed games of chicken. These safe-driving habits are additionally frustrating because the collision and acceleration physics are quite satisfying when used to their fullest potential. A more positive experience is the derbies, which allow drivers to freely crash their way to victory in four bowl-shaped arenas (like the concrete, multi-tiered Junkyard) without fear of a timer. This increased freedom allows the tight steering controls to really shine. Both races and derbies can be played across four difficulty settings through the single-event Arcade Mode or a multi-course marathon via World Championship mode. Each difficulty setting must be unlocked by completing the campaign on the previous tier, but the repetitive nature of races makes this a practice in tedium. The initial vehicle choices are equally dull: 12 stock cars with identical statistics (speed, acceleration, handling, durability), though clearing time trials and World Championship on each difficulty unlocks an additional 12 vehicles with a greater variety of statistics and designs, including a hard-hitting ambulance, speedy police car, and a Woody Wagon with the maneuverability of a brick. As with the difficulty settings, unlocking special cars feels like a chore due to the sameness of the initial selection, giving even less incentive to play World Championship mode when there is an option to load a single derby event and actually have some fun.

Reflections: *Destruction Derby 64*'s troubles begin at the conceptual level – demolition derbies should be brutal and fast. However, the focus on racing ensures that these factors take a backseat to accommodate an unsatisfying genre hybrid. The gameplay is at its best during the four demolition derbies that are mercifully included. Still, these segments do not occur often enough during marathon play to save the overall experience. Though I think this game could be fun to play with friends over a lazy afternoon, much like my view of the aforementioned Woody Wagon, I was glad to see its figurative taillights fade into the sunset. – CP

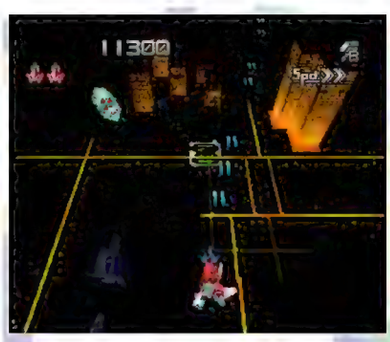
European Cartridge

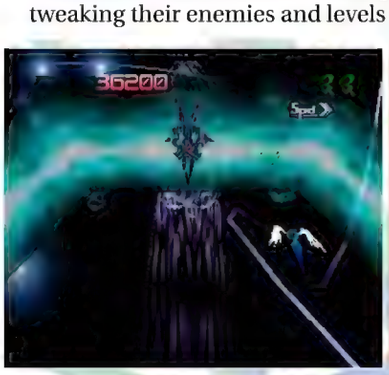
Dezaemon 3D

Genre: Creativity, Shooter
Release Date: June 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Athena
Publisher: Athena
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆

This complex construction workshop affords players the ability to create polygonal shooters. The build mode provides players with a robust design environment that, while not quite at a pick-up-and-play ease level, is still fairly intuitive. A thorough tutorial with amusing characters walks the player step-by-step through the process of creating models, background tiles, enemies, and music. Then, these disparate elements can be assembled into playable (and hopefully fun) levels. Using the built-in objects alone, the player can pit a martial artist, space fighter, or mech against various food items, spaceships, and robots. Each enemy can be customized with drawn textures and assigned hit points, movement patterns, and style of shots. A basic array of available power-ups includes shot items for primary and secondary weapons, 1-ups, bombs, shields, and bonus points. Levels can scroll vertically, horizontally, or diagonally; the direction can even change mid-stage, allowing for dynamic and exciting action. The music maker offers an easy-to-learn interface filled with synthesized instruments, sound samples, and a standard music staff for digital composition. Also included are a handful of sample games built with the software to demonstrate the impressive capabilities of the build mode. Two of them are accessible from the menu, and a hidden third requires entering a button code. These levels provide both inspiration and distraction when the player needs a break from the labor of game design. The thrill of creation is slightly dulled by relying on the cartridge's limited internal data storage, with only five slots available. The learning curve here is steep, but a player who takes the time to master it could easily find themselves immersed in the design process for hours, building and tweaking their enemies and levels to absolute perfection.

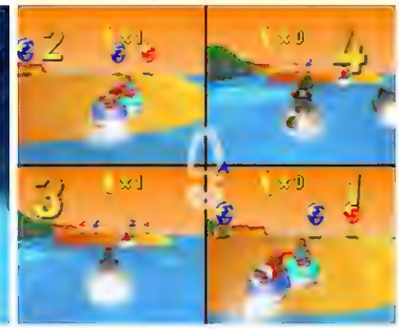
Reflections: *Dezaemon 3D* is a follow-up to *Dezaemon 2* on the Saturn and part of a series with entries on Famicom, Super Famicom, and PS1. As a longtime devotee of the shooter genre, I would have killed to see this released in the US. The tutorials are fun and make learning a game-building environment far easier than anticipated. An unreleased 64DD expansion disk would have alleviated the lack of storage, but even without it, I could create interesting levels full of enemy sushi without much worry. However, being unable to share those levels with others via Controller Pak remains a grievous fault. In the end, though, the sheer power of the creation tools won me over. – CW





Diddy Kong Racing

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Rareware
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆



Ride by land, air, and sea with Diddy Kong and friends to help rid the island of the evil bully Wizpig in this third-person kart-racing adventure. Eight characters, such as Banjo, Conker the Squirrel, and Tiptup the Turtle, are available at the start. They vary in levels of speed, weight, handling, and acceleration. After selecting a racer, choosing Adventure Mode will drop players into the colorful and fully 3D island hub, an open area filled with races to win, bosses to beat, challenges to conquer, and secrets to discover. Players can also explore the island to see the sights and practice their kart-driving skills. Doors, placed around the island, branch off into lobbies that contain sets of several tracks. Each set has a different theme, such as a prehistoric era or snowy mountains. Every lobby also has a battle-style challenge to unlock via a key hidden away in one of its tracks. Players can race with cars, hovercrafts, and planes. The controls feel intuitive across all three vehicles, though the hovercraft and plane aren't traditional kart-racing fare, so they may take some getting used to. Bananas can be collected during races that boost top speed, and weapon balloon pickups can provide a power-up or sabotage other racers (they can even be upgraded if they pick up consecutive balloons of the same color). A gold balloon is awarded for each victory, and the more of them a player has, the more tracks they can access. Unlocked tracks and secret challenges are also made available in Tracks Mode, where a player can race solo or with up to three friends. There are three cycles of lobby tracks to complete. First, simply win all the races. Second, complete the silver coin challenge, trying to win every race again while grabbing eight coins spread throughout a given track. Third, win a Grand Prix through the entire lobby. Each lobby also has a boss race that needs to be defeated twice, and they get much tougher on the second turn. Completing all these challenges is required to challenge Wizpig and unlock the game's last lobby, but the routine can get old long before finally getting there. The racing environments are lush and colorful, and characters are rendered nicely in their vehicles in full 3D. Plentiful voice acting and a consistently fun and energetic soundtrack add to the quality. This lighthearted kart racer has plenty of high points and charm to spare, even if its core ideas stretch a little thin.

Reflections: The silver coin challenges can be a real headache, but *Diddy Kong Racing* is still a good time overall. Tech-wise, it's also pretty impressive. What Rare accomplished here was no small feat for an N64 game released in 1997, even if achievements like this would become standard for Rare in their subsequent releases for the era. This title also marks the first appearance of Banjo months before *Banjo-Kazooie* was released, as well as Conker, whose *Bad Fur Day* N64 outing wouldn't happen until 2001. – NT

European Cartridge

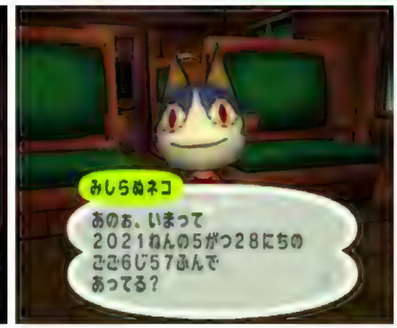
Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

Australian Cartridge

Dōbutsu no Mori

[Animal Forest]
Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Apr. 2001
Region: JP
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆



Set out to live in a town populated by animal neighbors in this charming and cheery life simulation. There is no story or goal to achieve. Instead, the life being led is entirely up to the player. Explore the town via overhead isometric perspective, get to know fellow villagers, pick fruit, catch bugs, garden, fish, dig for fossils and other buried treasures, and even decorate a house of the player's very own. These may not sound like the most exciting tasks, but they can prove enjoyable after getting settled in with the laid-back design. There is no pressure. The player can do nearly everything at their own pace and of their own interest. The layout of the town and the villagers who live in it from the start are randomly generated the first time the player starts out, making the virtual home unique. The town even gets a distinct jingle that plays each hour or whenever talking to a villager (like the friendly sheep, Stella, and the energetic tiger, Bangle). While on a train ride, answers in a conversation with a fellow passenger determine the player's appearance and let them choose their name and the name of the town. The talk also guarantees they have a house waiting for them upon arrival. Even though maps are randomly generated, they share consistent elements. For example, there is always a shop where players can buy and sell items and a post office where they can send letters and pay off their home's mortgage. Every cartridge has an internal clock that tracks the date and time, so not only does the player see a day-night cycle that runs consistent with the real world, but as the days, weeks, and months pass, they see the seasons change, too. Players might even see their villagers celebrating holidays or enjoying other community events. It all goes a long way toward making the town feel like a living, breathing place, one that a player will want to check in on often to reach their own goals and also see what the neighbors are up to.

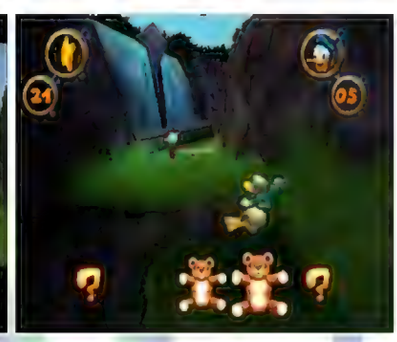
Reflections: You may have recognized that *Animal Forest* appears to be *Animal Crossing* on the GameCube. However, *Animal Forest* is a version of *Animal Crossing* minus a list of elements many of us came to expect, starting with that GameCube title (*Dōbutsu no Mori+*), which launched in Japan just a few months later and then was localized for North America. For example, players cannot donate the bugs, fish, and fossils they find to the museum because it isn't here. The Able Sisters are absent, too, so you can't make custom designs for your clothes. The core of the game is still here, and it's still captivating. It's just that playing *Dōbutsu no Mori* for the N64 now feels like playing a beta version of a game that was a short way off from being fully realized but still magical on its own merit. – NT

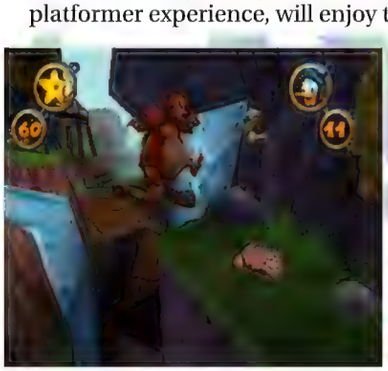
(Disney's) Donald Duck: Goin' Quackers

(Disney's) Donald Duck: Quack Attack (EU)
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Dec. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ubi Soft SARL
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

The dynamic Donald Duck fights throughout Duckberg to defeat the dastardly Merlock, stop his devilish cohorts, and rescue the delightful Daisy in this colorful 3D platformer. Donald can double-jump, punch, and kick to fight off an array of cartoonish enemies as he traverses four worlds of five levels each, accessed from a central hub. The level perspectives alternate between a behind-the-back 3D view and side-scrolling. The main objective in each world is to collect four Boss tile pieces from each of the four immediately accessible levels. Doing this unlocks the boss level, where Donald will face off against Bernadette the Bird, The Beagle Boys, Magica DeSpell, and finally, Daisy Duck's kidnapper, the wicked Merlock. Donald can only take two hits before starting from his last checkpoint, and his mood displays his current health. The first hit makes him go berserk, after which he stalks around looking furious, and the second one costs him a life. Extra lives are plentiful and earned by collecting either 100 stars or icons of Donald's face. Also found in the levels are milkshakes which put Donald into Hyper mood, giving him the super strength to knock enemies out of his way for ten seconds. In addition to the goal of defeating the boss, Donald must recover his nephews' stolen toys. There are three of these in each level. Attacking Merlock's floating magic books starts a countdown that shows how much time the player has to collect the toys. Also of note is that Donald is not the only duck seeking to rescue Daisy; Gladstone Gander has already preceded Donald through each world. If the player can beat his time in each level within a hub, they'll earn a new outfit for Donald. The colorful graphics faithfully represent the cartoon characters on which they are based. The music is peppy but somewhat forgettable. Though visually appealing, the levels are incredibly straightforward, with little emphasis on exploration or finding alternative paths. Aside from the ubiquitous stars, there are just a handful of collectible items. Fans of Donald Duck and other characters from the Disney comics and animated series that feature him, especially those looking for a simple but fun and quick platformer experience, will enjoy this title.

Reflections: *Donald Duck: Goin' Quackers* was the first game by Ubisoft SARL, based in Casablanca, Morocco, which makes it one of, if not the first, licensed console game developed in Africa. They dedicated it to the memory of Carl Barks (1901-2000), the Disney writer and cartoonist responsible for Donald, Scrooge McDuck, and the iconic city of Duckburg and many of its residents. I grew up watching Disney's *DuckTales*, so I was shocked and pleased to learn that the villain here is Merlock, the big bad from *DuckTales the Movie: Treasure of the Lost Lamp*. While clearly designed for younger players, it has that classic Disney charm and just enough challenge to draw in those who want a mascot platformer without as much collecting as the star games of the genre. – CW





European Cartridge
Donald Duck: Quack Attack

Donkey Kong 64

Genre: Platformer, Action-Adventure
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (required)
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆

The villainous crocodile King K. Rool and his Kremling forces have returned to wreak havoc on everyone's favorite primates by destroying Donkey Kong Island with a giant energy cannon. The lovable powerhouse Donkey Kong and nimble Diddy Kong are joined by the pint-sized firecracker Tiny Kong, the elastic orangutan Lanky Kong, and the massive but clumsy Chunky Kong in a third-person platforming collect-a-thon across eight massive levels and an equally expansive overworld. Each Kong can jump and pound the ground with varying levels of speed and strength based on their size. The Kongs also have unique attacks, fruit-firing guns, and shockwave-inducing musical instruments that can clear the array of reptilian foes from their immediate surroundings. The tropical overworld and varied levels, which include ancient ruins, an out-of-control factory, and a haunted ship, have ample opportunities to switch out characters using the floating Tag Barrel. Each Kong's abilities provide endless possibilities for experimentation and satisfying platforming, such as choosing Chunky's brute strength and pineapple grenade launcher to tackle foes or Lanky's far-reaching limbs and trombone to attack. Mastering each Kong is necessary, as the world's stages require constant backtracking, and powers such as Diddy's charge rush or Tiny's shrinking ability can unlock new areas. These worlds contain a mind-boggling plethora of things to collect. Golden bananas can unlock levels, boss keys open up new parts of the overworld, and more ubiquitous items like regular bananas and coins can unlock level bosses, new abilities, and weapon/instrument upgrades. Collecting these common items may be tedious since the Kongs must collect bananas and coins corresponding to a specific color, which leads to a level of backtracking that quickly loses its luster. Despite the occasional monotony of revisiting stages to find yet another collectible, the Kong family's adventure is worth experiencing for its polished and creative platforming mechanics. In addition to the single-player adventure are two multiplayer modes in which two to four players can hunt each other down in labyrinths or duke it out in a circular arena as endless enemies spawn. These modes are suitable for an afternoon with friends, but without the puzzles and collectibles found in the single-player mode, they ultimately feel shallow. Nonetheless, the mayhem of running and gunning with friends complements the eclectic mix of a grand, intriguing, arduous, and fun adventure.

Reflections: *Donkey Kong 64* was the first Nintendo 64 title that required the Expansion Pak to add more resource memory to function, so it was included with every game cartridge sold upon release. Though this was not Rare's last N64 game, *Donkey Kong 64* feels like a culmination of their platformer journey across the console. The use of various abilities to solve puzzles and engage in combat, grandiose environments, and the snarky wit that define Rare as a creative powerhouse are all present here. The use of multiple playable characters, sprawling worlds that organically unlock through repeated exploration, and creatures as humorous as they are expressive betray a clear evolutionary intent on the developers' part. Though this evolution presents occasional frustration, it is an excellent representation of creative problem-solving and the eternal struggle of all artists to build upon previous works in search of perfection. – CP

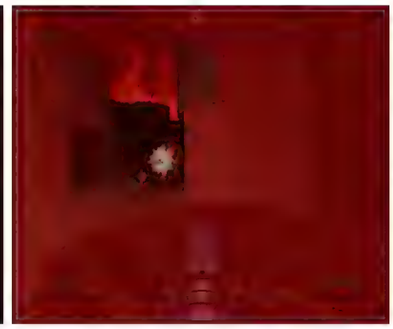
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

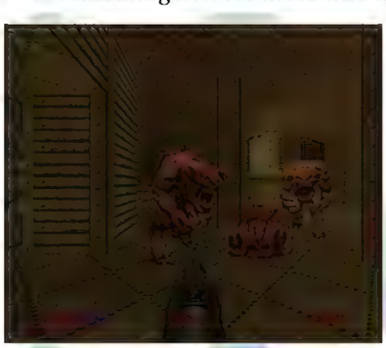
Australian Cartridge

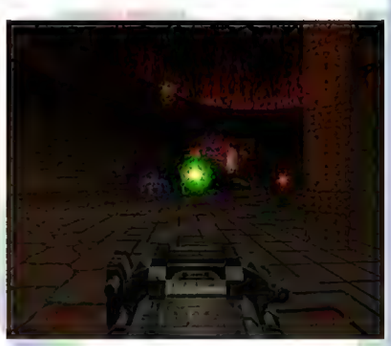
Doom 64

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Apr. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Dev.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GameBank (JP), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

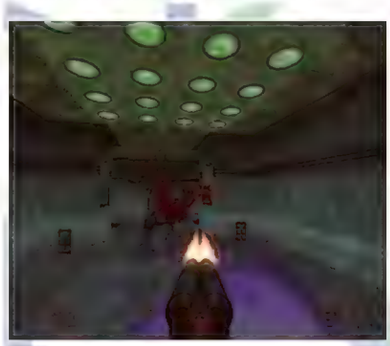


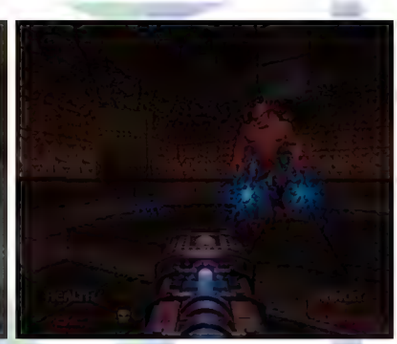
The unnamed Marine returns to battle the minions of hell in this first-person-shooter followup to the PC's *Doom* and *Doom II: Hell on Earth*. Armed initially with a pistol and punch, the player roams large, devilish maze-like stages to find the exit while battling enemies like zombie marines and fireball-firing imps. Weapon upgrades such as shotguns, the chaingun, and chainsaw are necessary to mow down feistier foes like bull demons, cacodemons, and hell knights. Giant terrors like the Mancubus or Cyberdemon may require heavier firepower from the rapid-fire plasma rifle, rocket launcher, BFG 9000, or the laser-firing Unmaker. Action is fast and tense as the marine roams the dark corridors and rooms, trying to survive a vast number of enemies and traps to find color-coded keys (red, blue, yellow) and switches to open their associated doors. Health and armor pickups can help stem the demonic tide, but other-dimensional artifacts, like invulnerability and partial invisibility, assist in inflicting massive amounts of fiendish carnage. While the more than two dozen stages can get tedious at times due to periodic difficulty in deciphering the proper stage course or an obtuse puzzle solution, the pace is mostly frenetic, and extras like hidden areas and bonus stages are welcome niceties. The grim violence is graphically pleasing as it stands as a complete upgrade from its predecessors, and the N64's ability to handle many monsters on-screen truly accentuates the wild and frequently desperate combat. The sound design is top-notch, as weapons and enemies all "pop," and the ambient/atmospheric score is an eerie and sometimes scary delight (crying babies!). This furious entry does justice to its infernal roots while offering a taste of something new for those who have returned to hell for some fun.





Reflections: *Doom 64* is a technical upgrade/sequel of the classic computer game that remains true to its spirit. Besides the graphical improvements, specific updates and touches make this version stand out, such as weapon recoil, a more effective dual-bladed chainsaw, and a quicker firing rate for the double-barrelled shotgun (nice!). I was initially disappointed to lose the interface from the PC version and not see the iconic Doomguy face while playing, but that was quickly forgotten. I was also pleasantly surprised by the completely customizable controls, which make the transition from the keyboard and mouse combination a bit smoother. In 2020, *Doom 64* finally saw a release on other platforms: PC, PS4, Xbox One, and Nintendo Switch. – PC





European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Doraemon 2: Nobita to Hikari no Shinden

[Doraemon 2: Nobita and the Temple of Light]
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Brainsmith
Publisher: Epoch
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

Doraemon and friends are back in a time-traveling, third-person adventure sequel to *Doraemon: Nobita to 3tsu no Seireiseki*! Control Doraemon, Nobita, and the others as they collect three crystals needed to fix their time machine. Around every corner is the selfish treasure hunter Mina blocking their way. In each 3D location on the alien planet, the party (represented by the sprite of a single, chosen character from the group) collects scattered items, which can be necessary to solve the puzzles behind hazards, like a guarded passage or inaccessible area, but they can also simply be collectibles. Most of them are Doraemon's secret gadgets, like the Air Candy, which allows someone to breathe underwater. The gameplay is relatively relaxed, with enemies reserved for the dungeons the party comes across throughout the free-roam world. Each location is unlocked linearly, and backtracking is necessary for any missed essential items. Time passes during play, indicated in the upper right, and if it becomes night, they start to lose health (from five total hearts) and need to either find a save point (usually an NPC's house) or use a Camping Capsule to sleep. Each day of the week brings a specialized quirk that may affect gameplay, such as rain on Water Day. However, there are a few occasions where the day may affect the success of an action, like when Wind Day slows tornadoes in a canyon, making them surmountable. When the party reaches one of the dungeons, they finally encounter some enemies, such as stone golems and laser-shooting robots, and have access to weapons, like the trusty Air Cannon. After entering a dungeon (along with a few other times), the player can choose the character to control, but they have no differences in abilities or weapon choice; it is strictly aesthetic. The textures are nicely varied and convey the sense of traversing the different environments, whether the desert, forest, or underground tunnels. The voice acting is also a plus, with plenty to enjoy in the many cutscenes featured in the adventure that weave the story and set up scenarios. The gameplay is quite linear, offering little in the way of challenge or satisfying exploration. Regardless, fans of Doraemon will find a sufficient amount of entertainment sleuthing out the next steps with their favorite robot cat in the lead.

Reflections: I enjoyed most of the gameplay changes the developers pursued in this sequel to *Doraemon*. Nothing stresses me out quite like trying to solve a puzzle under the pressure of attack, so having enemies restricted to the dungeons was great! While I loved the addition of the cutscenes, I found it disappointing that they played out with the antagonist, Mina, seemingly at the center of the story over Doraemon himself. It was so focused on her that the game could well have been a telling of her misadventures over Doraemon and friends. Not that I would mind a Mina spinoff. Maybe something like *Mina and Pyun: The Attempted Louvre Heist*. Come on, Epoch! Stop making toys and create this video game fantasy! – KY

Doraemon 3: Nobita no Machi SOS!

[Doraemon 3: Nobita's Town SOS!]
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: July 2000
Region: JP
Developer: AI
Publisher: Epoch
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆

Doraemon is back for a third time on the Nintendo 64! Join the blue robotic cat from the future as he returns for a fantastical adventure with his human friend Nobita to save their friends – and hometown – from some intrusive aliens. The story mode features Doraemon and friends exploring the 3D environments of four alien regions. The controls are smooth, although the camera movement feels limited, with the only options being a first-person view or centered behind the character. Each area has a handful of freely available locations, with the final one housing a boss fight that opens the path to the next one. Each place has various obstacles, from locked doors requiring a keycard to puzzles and monsters, like walking mushrooms and robotic drills. Weapons such as an air pistol, hand fan, air cannon, and grinning light/noise bomb are at the player's disposal. Enemies drop items when defeated, such as hearts and spray cans. The puzzles include issues like hidden doorways, broken windmills that supply a town with electricity, and other problems that require using one of Doraemon's many futuristic tools, such as needing the Shrink Ray to enter the homes of a Lilliputian race. While all the gadgets are available from the start, they must have space slime removed with the spray cans collected throughout the levels. The crux of most obstacles is figuring out which tool to use and where. Collectible objects respawn along with the enemies with every visit to the location, so there is never a shortage of hearts and slime remover. During the journey, rescued characters become available to play, with unique jumping and running abilities and their own health bar, which refills from using those collected hearts. Most of the gameplay focuses on puzzling out the use of gadgets and a low emphasis on combat, so the adventure is relatively one-dimensional. With the freedom to visit many locations at any given time, there is less of a feeling of getting stuck, as another obstacle is usually available to tackle. The graphics are bright and colorful, with unique surroundings (from an underwater base to a desert and fiery tower) and music to match the mood. There is also a multiplayer mode with many mini-games that up to four people can play for some Doraemon-adjacent fun, like a kart-style race and a quick-draw shooter. With so much to enjoy, fans of the blue robot cat are likely to find any issues are minor distractions from all the fun the best Doraemon entry on the system has to offer.

Reflections: As the self-proclaimed #1 Doraemon fan of the writers of this guidebook, I had a sense of relief when playing this game. For all the clunk and simplicity of the first N64 Doraemon game, the progression into *Doraemon 3* felt right. Whereas the second title was mainly the unimaginative formula of "find an object, use that object," the decision to give full access to all of Doraemon's crazy tools and weapons from the beginning truly made this game into one of his adventures. Sure, knowing (or being able to translate) Japanese is a must, but thankfully, after releasing the Guidance/Michibiki Angel from their slime, they provide solid hints as to what gadgets to use to help with an NPC's problem. After all, if Doraemon is known for anything, it's always helping out people in need. – KY

Doraemon: Nobita to 3tsu no Seireiseki

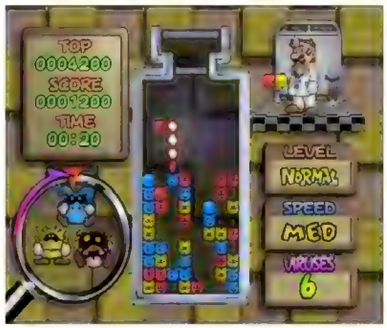
[Doraemon: Nobita and the 3 Spirit Stones]
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Mar. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Locomotive
Publisher: Epoch
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆

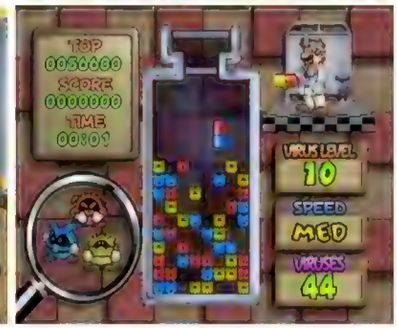
Adapted from the manga/anime of the same name, Doraemon is a loveable robot cat from the future who decides to help the fairy princess save her world. This third-person 3D adventure has Doraemon traveling throughout the fairyland to recapture the shards of the spirit stones. He begins in the main area, where different gadgets he collects open new levels, such as the Gill Tube, allowing him to travel to the underwater stages. Doraemon and his four human companions are all playable and have varying weapons and abilities. Doraemon uses an air cannon and is well-rounded (jumping, running, and attacking), while Nobita has the shockwave pistol and can defeat small enemies without crouching. Shizuka throws an arching flash grenade and jumps further, whereas Suneo punches with gloves and runs fastest. Finally, Gian uses a microphone to destroy with a shout and takes less damage. Each level has basic enemies, such as moles, bees, and crabs. They can be jumped on or attacked with weapons. Defeated enemies drop bells, which accumulate toward an extra life. Occasionally, an enemy drops a tasty treat instead, increasing the life bar in the upper left. The end of each area features a trial of sorts (a series of platforming, boss, etc.). Upon completion, Doraemon garners a stone shard, which he can give to one of the three imprisoned kings found. After vanquishing the boss at the nearby castle, the king is freed, and if Doraemon has collected all three shards of the king's type (earth, sea, or air), his highness forges the pieces together. With all three whole spirit stones, Doraemon can take on the Evil King to save the fairy world. The gameplay is straightforward, with areas becoming accessible by collecting items in the previous ones, although there are occasional alternate elements, like a car race or an autoscrolling shooter. The difficulty is relatively low, but this can be excused since this is a goofy adventure for children (the icy area boss is a giant Santa Claus). Unfortunately, the controls hold the entire experience back with imprecise movement and the subsequent inaccurate attacks, negatively impacting fighting sequences, especially boss battles. Seeing the series turned into a 3D game is fun, but the lack of challenge in both action and adventuring is a letdown.

Reflections: Even if you have never heard of Doraemon, you may be able to appreciate how adorable a time-traveling robot cat sounds. It is fun to jump around with a giant blue head, but I only noticed the sprites so much because the backgrounds were generally dull, although each area did have its own aesthetic. I try to explain it away as an early N64 release and justify it with the few levels of alternate gameplay. Being an adventure game with plenty of dialogue and a sizable introduction, this may seem like a dealbreaker for non-Japanese speakers. Still, it's straightforward enough that a little determination could see results. – KY

Dr. Mario 64

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Apr. 2001
Region: NA
Developer: Nintendo, Newcom
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆





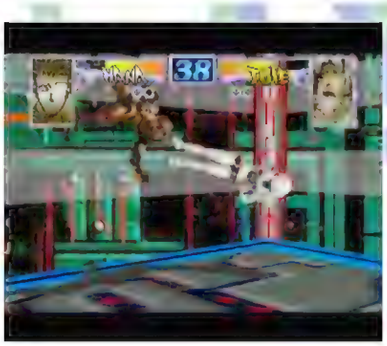
Dr. Mario is back with his patented Megavitamins, ready to shut down some viruses. There are several modes to play in this 2D puzzle title, including Classic, Story, Flash, and various multiplayer modes. In each mode, the player has a pill-shaped tank of goofy-faced viruses in red, yellow, and blue. A two-sided vitamin, consisting of one of the three virus colors on each side, is dropped from the top of the bottle. As the pill incrementally falls to the array of viruses with increasing speed, the player must rotate and position it to create a horizontal or vertical line of four or more blocks/viruses of the same color. Doing so clears those blocks/viruses, and any attached blocks fall until they reach another vitamin, virus, or the bottom of the screen. If the pieces reach the top of the tank, the level ends, and the player can give it another shot. The goal varies with the mode: Classic requires removing all viruses, while Flash focuses on eliminating the few flashing ones. Story mode pits the player one at a time against nine CPU opponents with cutscenes in paper-cutout style graphics. Three difficulties are available with different opponents based on whether they are playing as Dr. Mario or Wario. Marathon is an endless single-player mode, with new viruses constantly pushing up from the bottom of the bottle. In multiplayer or games versus the CPU (especially Story mode), send garbage blocks (pill pieces that fall in random locations) to opponents by clearing combos of two or more rows/columns simultaneously. The bigger the chain, the more garbage falls, the more garbage there is to deal with, and the more troublesome it is for the opponent. In modes with more than two players, the color of the matches also decides which one receives the garbage blocks, allowing for some devious tactics in larger games. Story mode offers the most for solo gamers, but all of them feel similar without requiring a new strategy or offering new gameplay. Regardless, the graphics are brightly colored 2D pixels, and the music is as catchy as ever, even including a revamped version of "Fever." This fast-paced puzzler will surely be a hectic good time and not a difficult pill to swallow.

Reflections: It's easy to see *Dr. Mario 64* as merely a remake of the NES title. For fans of the original, this has everything you enjoyed and more: new modes, more characters (mainly from *Wario Land 3* on Game Boy Color), and more simultaneous players. Despite the many modes presented, there is little meat to most of them. Besides Story mode, multiplayer is where you'll likely spend the most time if you can find other players. I understand if people are disappointed that this was the last first-party title of the system, but looking at it as a cheap (only $30 MSRP) pick-up of fun multiplayer modes on top of a classic game, I'd say it was a good offering! – KY

Dual Heroes

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Produce!, Hudson Soft
Publishers: Electro Brain (NA), Hudson Soft (JP), Gaga Communications (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

Take the role of one of eight combatants in this futuristic sci-fi-themed 3D fighting title. Humanity has discovered a new mineral known as Gaiathyst, but the evil Emperor ZORR wants to get his hands on it first. A select few heroes stand against him, each outfitted in a high-powered mech suit. Fighters can combine punches, kicks, and throws into simple attack combos as they whittle their opponents' health to zero in two out of three rounds. Jumping, crouching, and ground attacks are also available. Fighters have slightly different combat styles to try and differentiate them from others, like Hoe's dragon kung fu and the dancing lady Kumo. There are also character-specific moves, combos, and a "Lethal Change" ability per character, such as speeding up the fighter or inflicting damage even if an opponent is blocking. Unfortunately, the character moves are not unique or useful enough to make a big difference in how they are played. Arenas are all square, with a basic, stretched image as the base, and either surrounded by a standard fence, a damage-dealing electric fence, or nothing at all, which allows for ring-out victories. There is a story mode that sends the character through a gauntlet of enemies and ends with a boring text scrawl that brings the fighter's "story" to a close. Practice mode provides the opportunity to get a feel for the combat, and VS 2P mode allows fighting against a friend. VS VR mode is slightly more interesting because it gives a choice of which virtual opponent to face. Each has their own play style, reflected in how they control their randomly selected fighter (aggressive, fast, defensive). There is also Robot Training, which features an AI that learns from how the player-controlled character fights, becoming progressively tougher to beat. It does, in theory, anyway. The AI is abysmally stupid and does not even have the survival instincts to not walk out of the ring. Finally, there is Medal mode, which allows players to earn and gamble medals on fights against each other. If any player can garner enough medals, their reward is a picture of a slightly nicer medal. There is little to love in this fighting outing between the bizarre story irrelevant to the action, pedestrian graphics, lackluster combat, and hopeless AI.



Reflections: Believe it or not, *Dual Heroes* was a critical and commercial flop, but it was not due to a lack of pedigree. The director was Keita Amemiya, known for other creations for many television shows, including several of the Kamen Rider series. Tamotsu Shinohara, who handled the 3D character designs, also worked as a designer on several Super Sentai (Power Rangers) series. I can't tell you if the title was meant to be *Duel Heroes* rather than *Dual*, but I *can* tell you that the name *Dual Heroes* makes very little sense, no matter how hard you squint at it. – RR

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

(Looney Tunes) Duck Dodgers: Starring Daffy Duck

Daffy Duck Starring as Duck Dodgers (EU)
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Paradigm Entertainment
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆

Starring as the cocky Duck Dodgers character, Daffy Duck must save the planet in this unpredictable third-person 3D platformer. As expected, Marvin the Martian is behind the mischief, his newly built Ultimate Weapon primed and ready to torch Earth. To stop him, Daffy must collect the device's power source – energy atoms spread across five wacky planets – while dodging Marvin's traps and his hired minions. Like the classic cartoons, Daffy is more a failure than a savior, his clumsy antics making players work for every reward. The controls, although manageable, feel somewhat stodgy, with a flimsy forward kick serving as the duck's primary attack. His weak double jump is not much better, a move that is crucial for survival yet feels oddly awkward to perform. Holding R puts the would-be hero into tip-toe mode, a stealthy ability rarely used, while the C-buttons adjust the sometimes wobbly camera. For all of this mediocrity, a stellar amount of gameplay variety rebounds the experience. The initial desert planet stays safe with the usual minecart ride and bottomless hole tropes. Later venues offer boxing and basketball challenges, first-person-shooter survival runs, timed ice slide competitions, and even a tone-based brain teaser. Planet X, the last and looniest of Dodger's destinations, is nothing if not a guided homage to various Warner Bros. animated shorts, taking players through trippy landscapes, freaky transformation chambers, and surreal rocket rides. Daffy can occasionally find ray guns, bombs, and other incidental items for even more varied play against enemies like giant rats and red hairy, monster-like aliens. The end-level bosses are lifted straight out of their old cartoons for some iconic confrontations. The graphics skillfully depicts the Warner aesthetic, offering hyper-stylized landscapes full of bold, garish color. Despite some middling music, the abundant amount of voice work grants everything an expressive, infectious fervor. Daffy is a likable protagonist, providing the same acerbic wit and foul reactions fans know him for, albeit reduced to a sparse, polygonal form. Ironically, this means Duck Dodgers' adventures may be more fun to watch than play, a most despicable development, indeed.

Reflections: Cartoon shorts are just that – brief, six-to-eight-minute snippets of quick entertainment. That's why they're effective. Watching an anvil flatten someone is worth a moment's guilty giggle, but an hour of nonsense without relief or purpose soon becomes agonizing. Such is the problem with *Duck Dodgers*; it stretches a bite-sized gag into an ongoing gauntlet of collecting, exploring, and repeated one-liners, which probably explains why the overall direction feels so scattershot, even random. It's an inspired facsimile but one diluted by its form and genre limitations – a scintillating joke diminished by a flat, erratic delivery. – DA

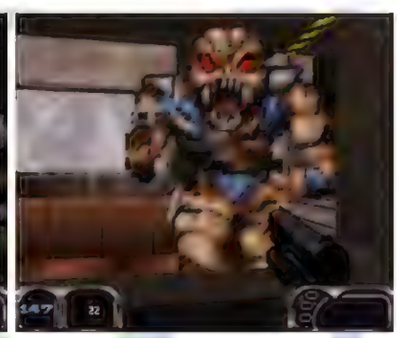
European Cartridge
Daffy Duck Starring as Duck Dodgers

Duke Nukem 64

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: 3D Realms Entertainment
Ported by: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: GT Interactive Software
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

"Come get some" as the badass Duke Nukem says in this port of the PC first-person shooter. Duke must run, swim, shoot, and jetpack across 30 levels as he slaughters aliens trying to take over the Earth. Duke has his melee "Mighty Foot" but can thankfully use a variety of weapons found throughout each stage. He starts with the basic handgun and can quickly get a shotgun, progressing to a sub-machine gun pair, plasma cannon, missile launcher, shrinker/expander (to stomp on tiny enemies or make them explode), laser tripbomb, and more. The enemy variety is hefty and features creepy red-eyed aliens full of razor-sharp teeth, mutated pig cops, and other bizarre entities. Most levels require Duke to locate color-coded key cards to access new areas and progress toward the exit. Duke can blow up cracked walls to reveal secret areas that hold items such as medkits, Vitamin-X (increases speed), and Holodukes (a hologram that confuses enemies). Players must keep their eyes peeled, as some walls need to be blown apart to progress. Scattered around levels are captured bikini babes Duke can choose to rescue, though doing so doesn't really affect the experience. Along the journey, quips and wisecracks from our hero, including some from classic films, add some levity. There are four control layouts, but each may take some time to master. The default option uses the Control Stick to look around, and the C-buttons control forward/backward and strafe left/right movements. This scheme makes strafing easy, but moving while ducking (holding the B button) is awkward. Using the Control Stick to move Duke makes ducking while moving more manageable, but this means the D-pad is used to free look, which is not ideal. Hit detection when using switches can be imprecise and requires players to look for a sweet spot to activate them. The stage music from the PC version has been removed from this port, which sometimes makes things eerily quiet. A four-player deathmatch mode does add some frantic fun, though. Unfortunately, much of the adult humor is missing in this port, but it doesn't detract much from the overall experience. A few glaring flaws are around, but spending some time with Duke is worth it.

Reflections: Nintendo made sure to keep Duke more "family-friendly" in *Duke Nukem 64*, a move the company was famous for in this era. One of the most notable changes is how Duke interacts with captured babes. In the original, they would beg Duke to kill them. In this version, babes are silent and cannot be killed, only rescued. Steroids also had their name changed to "Vitamin-X." Duke Nukem voice actor John St. John even had to re-record certain lines in order to replace instances of offensive language. To make up for the omissions, N64 owners will find a few new secret levels and weapons, which is pretty cool, I guess. – MV



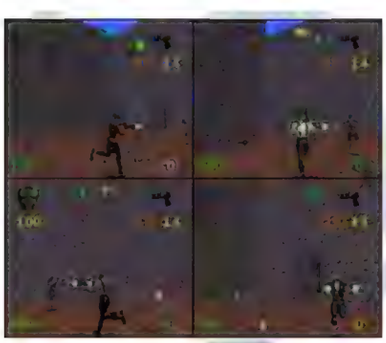
European Cartridge

Duke Nukem: Zero Hour

Genre: Third-Person Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: GT Interactive Software
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Duke Nukem is back to kick some alien ass in his second and final game on the Nintendo 64 console. This third-person shooter takes Duke throughout time as he attempts to foil aliens trying to change the past to make modern-day Earth weaker and easier to take over. During his adventure, Duke will battle enemies in present-time New York City, The Old West, and Victorian-era London, all while using weaponry from those eras. For instance, Duke will blast aliens away with shotguns in the present time and fire off a .45 revolver in The Old West. Duke can also utilize other weaponry like a submachine gun, pulse gun, sniper rifle, grenade launcher, multiple bombs, and exotic alien weaponry like the freeze-thrower and gamma cannon. Goopy, grotesque aliens, humanoid lizards, and Pig Cops are all out to get Duke. As a comedic twist, enemies are themed to the eras, meaning Duke will fight cowboy Pigs in The Old West or deal with gang scavenger Pigs in the post-apocalypse. Worse still, human zombies are a major concern since the past is being altered (plague-infested zombies stalk Victorian-era London), and futuristic drones abound. Power-ups like health and medkits, armor, night vision goggles, scuba gear, radiation-repellent boots, and a gas mask can help Duke. Like other Duke Nukem games, there are loads of hilarious one-liners, plenty of hidden areas to discover, and tons of babes that need saving. Boss battles are enjoyable and feature a screen-filling hog in a tank, a cyborg scorpion, and even Jack the Ripper. However, a lack of checkpoints may drive some gamers mad. Eight different control schemes are offered, meaning players shouldn't have a problem controlling Duke throughout history. Rounding out the package, up to four players can battle via split-screen in "Dukematch" (deathmatch), King of the Hill, and Last Man Standing game types. Duke fans will feel at home with this title no matter which era they blast aliens in.

Reflections: Regarding mature themes, the developers got away with much more in this title than with the first *Duke Nukem 64*. Duke has a more extensive foul language vocabulary this time, making the experience much better. Lines like, "Move it! Move it! I'm freezing my nuts off!" get me giggling every time! Of course, there are still some themes and items that the development team had to leave on the cutting room floor, but they seemed to take a jab at Nintendo while doing so. For example, the level "Dry Town" is rumored to reference Nintendo's policy (at the time) of not allowing any imagery or use of alcohol. – MV



European Cartridge

Earthworm Jim 3D

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: VIS
Publisher: Rockstar Games (NA), Interplay Productions (PAL)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

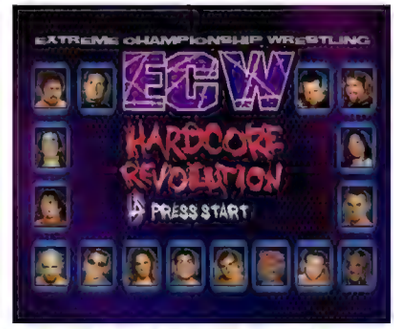
Earthworm Jim returns to battle the foes in his head in this platforming series' cow-launched leap from side-scrolling 2D to third-person 3D. Each of the four worlds has a specific theme (fantasy, memory, happiness, fear) and is divided into multiple sections, all inhabited by a host of bizarre enemies, including disco zombies, poultrygeists, and alien waiters. Jim fights back with his trusty blaster and head whip, the former allowing for longer-range attacks while the latter shines in close-quarters combat. Powerful but limited-use weapons are available via vending machines, such as gnoming missiles (homing missiles that are gnomes), egg-chucking sniper rifles, and a cleaver boomerang that gruesomely decapitates foes. Despite all this firepower, the main emphasis is on exploration. Each level has 100 marbles and several hidden udders that players must collect. Earn udders by solving simple switch puzzles, clearing areas of enemies, and performing simple fetch quests. The player cannot proceed to the next area until obtaining a set number of udders and marbles. Jim has a power suit gauge with a basic health bar. If he takes too much damage, he loses a life. Killing enemies and collecting marbles restores health, and the occasional extra life can be found hidden in stages. The camera and perspective are awful. For example, a section where Jim collects a tin of beans to fart-propel upwards is almost impossible with the constantly moving view. This flaw becomes even more problematic when the design focuses on exploration. Jim also takes damage from falling, making some level designs a frustrating pain point. At the end of each brain area, a boss encounter awaits. These segments play out almost identically; Jim slides around on a pig, battling against an opponent to collect all 100 blue marbles in shallow, uninteresting vehicular combat, reskinned to match each antagonist's theme. The cartoonish visuals and character models are ugly, looking blocky and deformed. Dan Castellaneta (aka Homer Simpson) leads the solid voice acting, but the music behind the dialog is a series of maddeningly short and repetitive music loops. While this collect-a-thon marries the series' irreverence to some solid 3D controls, there is too much reliance on comedic antics, which cannot cover up questionable design choices and repetitive gameplay.

Reflections: What an absolute shame that Jim's third outing was the nail in the coffin for the Earthworm Jim series. *Earthworm Jim 3D* was (unsurprisingly) the first non-2D entry. While it tried to emulate the same fast action and irreverent sense of humor as the side-scrolling 16-bit platformers before, the final product doesn't come together as a fun experience. The relatively inexperienced development team at VIS struggled to recreate Shiny Entertainment's magic. A timeline fraught with scrapped ideas, reworked mechanics, and repeated delays resulted in *Earthworm Jim 3D* getting released as a flawed, incomplete title. – JE

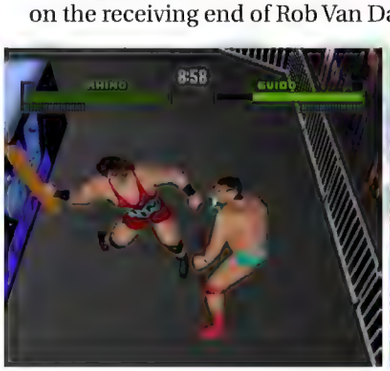
European Cartridge

ECW Hardcore Revolution

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Dev.: Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆



The unabashedly violent wrestling organization, Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW), debuts its first video game with this N64 release. Matches occur with an elevated camera perspective directly in front of the ring. Most match types aim to drop the opponent's health low enough so they can be submitted or pinned. Each wrestler has a unique set of damaging attacks, available while standing, running, while the opponent is grounded, jumping from the top turnbuckle, etc. Single button presses dish out basic strikes, but more complicated moves require combos, like pressing LEFT, RIGHT, UP, and B to deliver Mike Awesome's Awesome Bomb. These moves take more time to pull off, but they deal more damage if one lands. Be prepared to struggle with memorizing moves and having their complex inputs successfully recognized in the heat of battle. Many weapons can be wielded against opponents in Deathmatch and Last Man Standing modes, such as a 2x4, bedpan, chair, trash can, and even a cheese grater (!). 43 ECW stars (along with 11 bonus characters) grace the roster, with Rob Van Dam, Sabu, Tommy Dreamer, and Taz being a few standouts. The in-depth Career Mode allows a grappler to work up the rankings to unlock bonus wrestlers and cheats. Barbed Wire Match replaces traditional ring ropes with sharp wires that will have combatants bleeding all over the mat. It sounds fun in theory, but this mode doesn't offer anything unique or fascinating, just blood, lots and lots of blood. A detailed Create-a-Wrestler feature saves the day by letting players customize a wrestler right down to their tattoos. It is fun to churn out zany creations, and when combined with the Create-a-Pay-Per-View feature, a customized wrestler can fight through an entire season of matches, just like on TV. These personalization options are by far the most entertaining part of the package. Unfortunately, they are not enough to make up for the lack of unique main modes, and when paired with the complicated control scheme, it creates a recipe for frustration. Unless a player is a loyalist intent on experiencing the first ECW video game and can handle the controls, they may have more fun on the receiving end of Rob Van Dam's Five Star Frog Splash.



Reflections: The same development team that worked on *ECW Hardcore Revolution* also tackled *WWF Attitude*. Both games share identical match modes, camera perspectives, and, worst of all, that aging, complex control scheme. Acclaim actually lost the WWF license in late 1999 but quickly snagged the rights to ECW, prompting them to rush *ECW Hardcore Revolution* out the door less than half a year after *Attitude*. The M-rated novelty included gritty character models and plenty of blood and violence, but the entertainment value those features offer wears off quickly. *ECW Hardcore Revolution* sold so poorly on the N64 that Acclaim skipped releasing the follow-up, *ECW Anarchy Rulz*, on the system. – DK

European Cartridge

Eikō no St Andrews

[The Glory of St Andrews]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: JP
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-4
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

The Nintendo 64's first golf entry brings players to the birthplace of the modern game, Scotland. The Old Course at St Andrews is the challenge that awaits, and its recreation is faithful. The course is not much to look at, as St Andrews is dull, drab, and difficult, producing a package with an ugly outer shell. Players can participate in stroke, match, or tournament play by choosing one of four duffers. A training mode is available for those who prefer to experience the 7,305 yards solo. When addressing the ball, the C-buttons can swing the camera around the 3D environment before taking a shot. This capability is a nice touch that allows players to see more of the course as they travel the links. When it is time to introduce the club to the ball, there are various things to consider, all of which make the gameplay more satisfying. Beyond the club selection and weather considerations, players can determine where to place the tee and strike the ball. For most shots, connecting with the ball in the cursor's default position is advisable. A large red target then appears on the ball, gradually getting smaller. The size of the target resets, and the shrinking repeats until the player taps the A button. The smaller the target ends up, the more accurate the shot. After that, pulling the analog stick back and pushing it forward smacks the ball, hopefully landing it closer to the green than where it began. Unless, of course, it is in a bunker. Even the most casual golf fan knows the headaches bunkers can induce, but it may be easier to escape the sand at the real-life St Andrews than in this interpretation of the iconic course. Whether it is the 'Hell Bunker' on hole 14 or the 17th hole's infamous 'Road Hole Bunker,' stay away from these beastly pits. Ultimately, there is not a great deal of gameplay here. The gameplay offered is very well done from a technical standpoint, but there is only one course to play. Multiplayer adds some mileage, particularly if those friends can appreciate the majesty of St Andrews. While purists are likely to get more out of this than players seeking a casual experience, it is still worth checking out for anyone seeking an early digital representation of the "Grand Old Lady."

Reflections: I had fun with this one, but it must be said that it is far from a visual marvel. That is certainly not the fault of anyone who worked on *Eikō no St Andrews*. They did a fantastic job recreating the Old Course, but the Old Course is ugly. The appeal is the tradition and the challenge, not the aesthetics, so keep that in mind when you play. The developers went with realism, and they nailed it. Once upon a time, Sam Snead, the PGA Tour's all-time leader in wins, was traveling by train past the Old Course. He asked a fellow passenger, "Can you tell me what they call that? Looks like an old abandoned golf course." That was just before he won the 1946 British Open at St Andrews, fifty years before this game was made. – KS

Elmo's Letter Adventure

Genre: Educational
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: NewKidCo
Players: 1
Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

There is a parade on Sesame Street, and Elmo's friends have letter-hunting adventures for him. This educational experience is a simple, 3D, third-person outing for toddlers and preschoolers, incorporating only the directional controls and face buttons. The only in-game menu is for difficulty, dictating how many letters he must find and how many mistakes are permitted before levels restart. The classic Sesame Street set is somewhat miniaturized but faithful, and all the puppets have been translated to 3D accurately, including voices from their original actors. Elmo begins on Sesame Street with Grover, Ernie, and Big Bird. All of Elmo's friends have fantasy worlds with two levels where he searches for letters along roving pathways. These worlds are colorful and uniquely decorated, each having its pleasant musical theme. Grover invites Elmo to outer space, where he drives a rover on the moon and a rocket through the galaxy, Big Bird brings him to a farm where Elmo walks through fields and rides a pogo stick, and Ernie takes him swimming in an underwater world. Elmo can speak with any of them to play, and they instantly go to the world, where Elmo's friend gives more instructions. The muppets pick a letter, and Elmo must collect all instances of it along a pathway by pressing A or B beside it. Elmo has no enemies except himself and perhaps the automatic camera, which is always behind him and uncontrollable. If he selects too many incorrect letters or reaches the end of the path, the level ends and starts over, although he does not lose any collected letters. After he has found enough, he is taken to a bonus game in a park, where Elmo walks in a circle and chooses letters to complete words, such as "mail," "frog," and "coat." Upon spelling enough of them, Elmo's friends cheer, and everyone returns to Sesame Street. When all their levels are completed, a festive Roman candle goes off, and Elmo can play again after the credits. This educational experience introduces children to spelling and also demonstrates basic maneuvers and concepts of the gaming medium. Young children who like Sesame Street will enjoy this adventure, but the repetition and slow pace might also bore them. While parents may need effective educational games for children, this experience's simplicity does not cut it.

Reflections: I had heard of the N64 Elmo games before via comedic "Let's Play" videos on YouTube (and for some reason, the N64 version seems to get more attention than its PlayStation counterpart). Since it isn't a terrible game, the appeal I experienced came from the silliness of watching adults play a game intended for toddlers. The manual addresses parents, instructing them on how to help children play. The idea that a video game would be needed to teach kids about video games seems quaint now. This cart represents a simpler time in more ways than one. – KN

Elmo's Number Journey

Genre: Educational
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: NewKidCo
Players: 1
Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

It is parade day on Sesame Street, and Elmo is going number hunting with his friends. This title is designed for children between three and six years old. Appropriately, the interface is simple, only utilizing directional controls and the A, B, and C-buttons. There are no menus except a difficulty screen showing easy, medium, and hard; higher levels mean more numbers to collect and fewer chances for mistakes. The in-game perspective follows Elmo in third person, with the camera following automatically. He begins on Sesame Street, accurate to the classic TV puppet show, with Cookie Monster outside Hooper's Store, Ernie on the apartment steps, and Count von Count in the lot between them. All muppets are well-rendered in 3D and fully voiced with their original actors. If Elmo talks with them, they take him to a new location to search for numbers, each area having two bright, colorful, repetitive levels and a bonus world. Cookie Monster brings Elmo to Cookie World, where Elmo rides a chocolate river and snowboards on sugar. The Count brings Elmo to his castle and hedge maze, and Ernie takes him to a park carnival with bumper cars. Elmo's friend names a number, and Elmo must find all manifestations of it, usually numerals and occasionally groups of objects (like six bats or nine candies). They appear along winding pathways among other numbers, and he must select the correct ones by pressing A or B beside them. Picking too many incorrect numbers or reaching the end of the path restarts the level automatically without penalties to Elmo's total. Levels repeat until all progress bars are filled. Upon doing so, Elmo accesses a bonus round in a garden where he tosses baseballs into a giant muppet jester's head. Basic math problems appear, and he must throw the number of balls equaling the solution and then ring a bell to submit the answer. Once he has solved the equations, he is congratulated and returned to Sesame Street. After completing all levels, fireworks celebrate his accomplishments, the credits roll, and the game starts over. Each stage has upbeat music with sparse but appropriate sound effects. This adventure into academics introduces children to arithmetic and the medium of gaming itself. It might work for children who love Elmo, but they are soon likely to become bored.

Reflections: *Elmo's Number Journey* was also released on the PlayStation, but they are fundamentally identical apart from some full-motion video sequences. Elmo was probably chosen as the star of this release and *Elmo's Letter Adventure* because he was popular in the 1990s, highlighted by the Tickle Me Elmo toy pandemonium in 1996. He occupied the spotlight so much on the TV show that some fans think Elmo "ruined" *Sesame Street*. I can understand that, but he's not guilty. The target demographic changed to a younger audience, making it seem childish to older kids who remembered the more "mature" *Sesame Street*. Although Elmo's rivalry with Rocco is relatable at any age. – KN

Excitebike 64

Genre: Racing
Release Date: May 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Left Field Productions
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Fifteen years after the release of *Excitebike* on the NES arrives the same fast-paced motocross action in 3D glory full of turns and slides! Fluid controls allow the third-person racer to accelerate, brake, perform tricks, and use Turbo via the Z-trigger, which adds crucial speed but can overheat the engine if overdone. Either the D-pad or Control Stick can be used to turn the bike or tilt it mid-air to adjust the landing angle. Movement is tight, so any squirrelly motion stems from the racer's bike and player rather than a programming misstep. There are many modes to experience, but the main one is Season, which consists of a series of 11 indoor and nine outdoor tracks in groups. Riders earn points based on their position after individual tracks, and placing first in total points unlocks the next set of increasingly difficult races. Picking the best racer for a circuit can be vital to final placement as each of the six riders has different stats in landing, cornering, jumping, and speed, as well as a unique stunt on top of the ones everyone can access. In Season, winning certain races unlocks content in the other modes, including Special Tracks, a bonus mode with unique objectives, like hitting a sequence of checkpoints in an endless desert or playing motocross soccer with a comically large ball. There is also Custom Tracks mode, where a player can create a personalized indoor track full of turns, bumps, and ramps. A moderate learning curve may slow progress in Season, but thankfully, Tutorial helps to start things out. The sheer breadth of techniques can be a lot for some players, especially those less experienced with the genre. The graphics are clean and well-detailed, with rich textures to differentiate the outdoor tracks, although the indoor ones have overly similar backgrounds. A high-octane song accompanies each race, but the screaming of the motorbike engines and the announcer's progress calls mostly drowns it out. The wide variety of experiences for single players and multiplayer alike make this the perfect choice for racing Season throughout the week to unlock material to play with friends on the weekend.

Reflections: *Excitebike 64* is an entertaining game, but nostalgia whacked me way too hard with the mention of "Excitebike" to enjoy it as much as I should have. Frankly, I'm not the best at racing games, so I leaned hard on the tutorial, which is fine, but I couldn't beat the final timed test. I got within less than a tenth of a second and didn't have the heart to keep trying. It's too bad because awaiting anyone who does fully complete the tutorial unlocks the original 1985 *Excitebike* under Special Tracks. Beating all of Season mode also unlocks a version of the classic in 3D. I guess I will just have to be satisfied with playing the NES version on the original console. – KY

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Extreme-G

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

In the future, Earth is a wasteland, home to little more than remote-controlled plasma-powered bike races. This battle-racer's key aesthetics are its dystopian setting and the sense of speed it offers as bikes loop, leap, and twist around tracks. Use the analog stick for steering, the Z button to accelerate, deploy missiles, mines, and other weapons with A and C-right, and initiate slides with R. Single-player modes vary, from racking up kills in Shoot-Em-Up or getting a feel for the courses in Practice mode. The split-screen multiplayer Head to Head emphasizes speed over combat and is one of the better modes outside of the main game. Other multiplayer modes like Battle Arena and Multiplayer Cup are passable but not as interesting. Players will spend most of their time in the single-player Extreme Contest, where the goal is to earn enough points in each race to claim the championship. Ten playable bikes vary in appearance and attributes, offering faster acceleration, stronger shields, and better turning abilities. Success depends on navigating sharp turns at high speeds while avoiding weapon assaults from competitors. Nitro power-ups (used by pressing C-down) are helpful to speed past opponents on straightaways, and weapons like homing missiles and mines give the player a chance to fight back. Keen reflexes and driving skills are needed to stay at the front of the pack. A dozen track choices offer nice visual and design variety, from decaying cities to twisty canyons and bleak deserts. While good overall, it's also difficult for the wrong reasons. Anticipating turns and obstructions is challenging, thanks to the short draw distance. While there are unlockable bikes and tracks to look forward to, almost perfect play is required to get them, which is more frustrating than fun.

Reflections: Released at the height of pop culture's obsession with extreme sports, *Extreme-G* attempts to fit in that niche as a sci-fi racing title channeling the *X Games* and *Tony Hawk*. Throw in a bit of dystopian dread (save the planet!) on top of an adrenaline-pumping techno soundtrack, and the experience is almost time-capsule-worthy. I really enjoy zipping around tracks and marveling at the incredible visuals, such as portions that loop around like a roller-coaster or flashes of lightning seen in the distance. However, some tracks make me want to pull my hair out. I'm not sure who thought it would be a good idea to place a 90-degree turn on a narrow track in a game that encourages reaching speeds in excess of 300 mph. Total buzzkill, bro! – JBr

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Extreme-G: XG2

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Probe Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Hop on a plasma-powered bike and blast off in this second entry of the extreme third-person battle-racing series. A dozen tracks, ten futuristic-looking bikes, and 20 different items and weapons await post-apocalyptic thrill-seekers. Choose a bike based on varying attributes such as acceleration, handling, or shield strength, then hit the pavement. In addition to precision steering with the Control Stick, players can slide, use weapons (missiles, cannon, mines, mortar, etc.), strategically brake, and boost with nitro. While racing to stay ahead of the crowd, acquired weapons and items will change players' strategies. For example, Flame Exhaust is ideal for torching tailgating opponents, and a well-timed Homing Missile on the final stretch can mean the difference between second and first place. Single-player features Practice, Time Trial, Extreme Contest, and an arcade mode that lets players rack up high scores by shooting drones. Only two tracks are initially available in single-player; the rest open up by completing stages in Extreme Contest, which also unlocks new superbikes with powered-up stats. The difficulty in these later tracks takes a sharp spike upwards, so don't hesitate to use other modes to practice courses. Multiplayer offers traditional Head to Head, co-op cup races, and the Battle Arena, where players operate tanks to blast opponents into the next galaxy. Two-player co-op helps alleviate the high difficulty level in later solo stages, as only one player needs to qualify for both to advance. Although the eye candy impresses with bubbling lava streams and 360-degree tunnels, the unnecessarily confusing track design can be a real drag. Some bizarre physics exacerbate the problem. Far too often, the bike will face the wrong direction after a particularly violent crash or lose all momentum when clipping the rails on narrow tracks. Fortunately, there are still enough high-speed thrills, souped-up items, and fun multiplayer options to keep racing fans engaged.

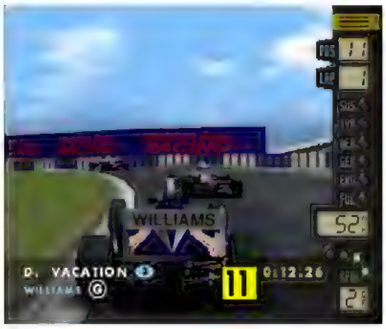
Reflections: You may notice that *Extreme-G: XG2*'s high-speed gameplay, techno music, menu options, and bike controls are nearly identical to its predecessor. That was a wise choice, as these aspects of the Extreme-G series make them so enthralling. One notable but unnecessary difference is the addition of human riders in *XG2*. Before, bikes were just bikes speeding around tracks and trashing each other with items. Now, people are crouching on these G-bikes, and I have no idea why. It almost seems like a misguided attempt to mimic characters' personalities in similar games like *F-Zero*. Without one-liners or any other hints of their personalities, you completely forget they even exist. Forgoing driver depth was maybe a missed opportunity, but at least it doesn't detract from the experience. – JBr

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

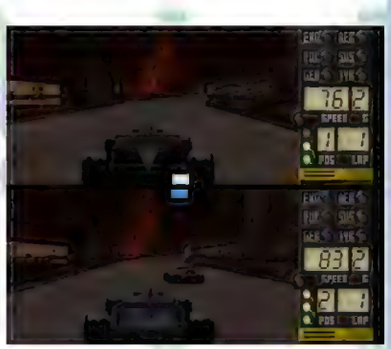
F-1 World Grand Prix

Genre: Racing
Release Date: July 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Paradigm Entertainment
Publisher: Video System Co
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



Formula One enthusiasts can rejoice since an authentic recreation of the motorsport is faithfully represented in this racing simulation. All 17 worldwide tracks from Canada to Japan are here, along with 21 of the 22 official 1997 drivers like Damon Hill and Michael Schumacher (Jacques Villeneuve is the sole licensing holdout). Race speeds can exceed well over 200 mph and are experienced from a first- or third-person perspective, including an impressive cockpit view where the high-octane speeds are visibly pulsating through the driver's hands. Multiple control and accessibility options offer acceleration and braking assists, a track-worn driving line, optional car damage, pit stops, and the use of caution flags to ease F-1 game newcomers in. Purists can minimize or altogether disable these options for a total simulation experience. Testing out races with some of these accessibility options yields a more approachable race where it is quicker to move through the field. On the other hand, disabling assists enables more vehicle control and makes every hard-earned overtake a gratifying moment, regardless of the finishing position. Before each race, players can fine-tune their vehicle's tires, suspension, gears, and wings on the PADDOCK computer or choose one of several presets. It would be wise to master a control setup in one-off Exhibition races and Time Trials before diving into the Grand Prix mode, where players will partake in an entire 17-race season. Challenge mode replicates 15 scenarios from the 1997 season that will jump players into a critical race point to meet specific objectives, like finishing a race with a partially banged-up machine or playing defense to keep opposing drivers from passing. A one-on-one multiplayer mode is available to challenge a friend, but there is no option to compete against AI cars. This 2-Player mode allows horizontal- or vertical-split-screen views. The cars and tracks all look well depicted from their natural counterparts, with stunning rain effects also being a marvel. The blaring engines and the crew chief's race alerts highlight the audio component. A diverse variety of control options and an excellent overall presentation make this a pole position worth vying for.

Reflections: This was released when there was no official United States Formula One race, which resulted in the game having an unofficial Hawaiian bonus track. This unlockable stage resembles an arcade racer, with its tropical palm tree décor standing out while racing through volcanic caverns and on suspension bridges! Nintendo helped the publisher Video System by being the distributor for this title, which paid off with it selling over 1.5 million copies worldwide. Most of those sales happened in Europe, and the N64 sequel only saw a release in that region. – DK



European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

F-1 World Grand Prix II

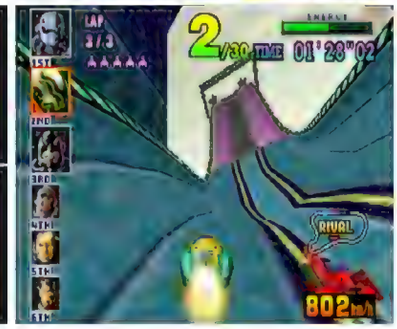
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: PAL
Developer: Paradigm Entertainment
Publisher: Video System
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

The sequel to *F-1 World Grand Prix* ensures this first- or third-person racing simulation is up to date with the latest drivers, teams, and official circuits from the 1998 Formula One season. These high-end machines require top-notch precision to handle sharp corners and sudden chicanes. Racing on Professional or Champion difficulties is where racing veterans go to maximize drafting to overtake opponents, adhere to caution flags, carefully plan pit strategy, and fine-tune their vehicle's wings, tires, and suspension settings with the PADDOCK computer. Players new to F1 should start with Rookie difficulty and customize options like car damage, caution flags, race length, and acceleration and brake assists for a more welcoming experience. A pit crew chief helps with race strategy with consistent, audible alerts on the closest competitors while advising when to pit based on the car's condition. An accurate 1998 schedule means competing in all 16 circuits, like Monaco's surrounding city life and Monza's treacherous chicanes. Aside from Jacques Villeneuve's exclusion, all other 21 remaining F1 wheelmen are here, such as Giancarlo Fisichella and David Coulthard. After settling on one of these drivers with practice in Exhibition races and Time Trials modes, it will be off to start an entire Grand Prix season. An attractive "98 Events" option inserts accurate weather conditions from the 1998 season and AI drivers using their authentic qualifying and finishing times. After wrapping up a season, capitalize on all those laps of experience in the Challenge mode, which features 15 scenarios to complete, like making up ground after falling behind from an early mistake or trying to secure a podium finish within a few laps. A friend may be the ultimate challenge in one-on-one multiplayer with either horizontal- or vertical-split-screen perspectives. The Expansion Pak is supported but offers no graphical improvement from the already visually impressive cars and scenery and only unlocks full-race replays. A wealthy amount of accessibility options makes this another suitable and rewarding experience for fans of both serious simulation and pick-up-and-play racing.

Reflections: This essentially feels like the Formula One equivalent of a sports game "roster update." In this case, the unfortunate side effect means less content because the 1998 F1 season removed the Jerez track from the official season of races. It is still here but needs to be unlocked by either winning the Grand Prix season or entering a code. While how that is handled makes sense, what does not is the complete removal of the excellent American track from the last game. Leaving that course out and taking out all the handy PADDOCK tuner presets makes this sequel difficult to recommend to anyone other than die-hard F1 fans who want the most up-to-date drivers and tracks. – DK

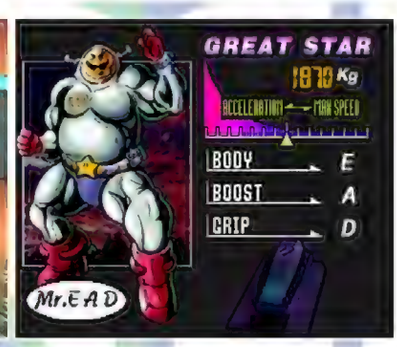
F-Zero X

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆



What awaits professional racing in the far-flung future? According to this manic third-person racer, a host of superheroes, profiteers, and ne'er-do-wells will compete in high-speed thrill rides on tracks that crisscross the sky. Their crafts are fragile, slippery machines: rocket-powered hovercraft barreling over free-floating courses with more loops and corkscrews than the fiercest rollercoaster. In truth, just surviving can be a struggle when a single misjudged jump can mean a plummeting game over. Fortunately, the basic controls are simple to learn, with the accelerator always pressed, and the brake rarely touched. Holding Z or R while tilting the Control Stick left or right helps with rounding the sharper turns, while punching B trades a slice of the vehicle's energy meter for a temporary boost of needed speed. Drifting maneuvers, plus side and spin attacks, are also possible (and necessary) for those hoping to master the higher difficulties. It is not uncommon to behold a gaggle of racers ricocheting ahead like hockey pucks slapped into free-spinning oblivion. Racers must watch their energy level (lest they explode), but helpful pit areas on the course will replenish it. The 30 flamboyant pilots are all playable and uniquely defined. The young Jodie Summers, for instance, excels in pinpoint turning, the evil Black Shadow's machine specializes in sheer durability, and the otherwise useless Mr. EAD packs a tremendous boost. Four camera perspectives help manage the chaos, allowing players to zoom in for a more visceral experience or toggle it back for a bird's-eye view, and there is plenty to see. Divided equally between Jack, Queen, King, Joker, and X competitive cups, 30 races are ultimately available. The final contest, once unlocked, provides a fresh set of procedurally-generated courses on every playthrough, thereby rewarding the player's diligence with endless variety. Rounding out this cornucopia of content is four-person multiplayer, a battle-focused "Deathrace" mode, time trials, a pumping soundtrack, and a mesmerizing 60 frames-per-second execution. A dark racing future has never looked brighter.

Reflections: *F-Zero X* is perhaps the perfect sequel. Although visually stark and brutally hard, players will barely care as they lose themselves to the game's trippy, undulating lanes and hallucinogenic causeways – all with metal guitar screaming at their rear. It is a decidedly un-Nintendo experience, then and now, and one the company never quite managed to duplicate with the two Game Boy Advance sequels. Perhaps this explains why they enlisted Sega to help revive the fading franchise with 2003's *F-Zero GX* on the GameCube. Fans still debate whether it surpasses *X*'s more raw, primal demands; indeed, outside another (Japanese-exclusive) GBA game released a year later, the franchise has been stuck in a purgatorial pit stop ever since. – DA



European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

F1 Pole Position 64

Human Grand Prix: The New Generation (JP)
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Human Entertainment
Pub.: Ubi Soft Entertainment (NA, PAL), Human Entertainment (JP)
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

International triumph and the world's fastest cars await in this first- or third-person racing game. Get behind the wheel as one of 22 drivers from the 1996 Formula 1 season, like Jean Alese or Mika Häkkinen – or the mysterious "Driver-X," who replaces Jacques Villeneuve on the roster. All 16 tracks from the 1996 season are represented, from the kickoff race in Australia to the season finale in Japan. Careful braking is required when approaching every turn, and careless driving and colliding with competitors catalyzes performance-altering damage to the player's car. This deterioration will lead to an earlier-than-anticipated visit to the pits and, eventually, an early retirement from the race. F1 enthusiasts will appreciate this degree of challenge and pre-race vehicle customization to parts like wings, tires, and suspension to achieve peak performance on the asphalt. Players who prefer to avoid worrying about vehicle damage or fuel levels should switch to easy difficulty, as those micromanagement examples do not apply there. Players may enjoy themselves more during the race on easy mode since the racing is designed as a simulation-based rendition of the sport on the normal and hard difficulties. Those levels of play are challenging experiences for those who can tolerate them because seemingly unfair wear and tear will appear quickly on the graphical damage indicators after just a few slightly mishandled turns. The easy difficulty is a naturally more accessible experience where most can race worry-free. A decent slate of single-player modes is available, where one-off Battle races and Time Trials are recommended places to practice before starting up an entire 16-race season in the World Grand Prix mode. A complete lack of multiplayer offerings is a head-scratcher and does not go unnoticed here. The midrace weather transition effects from daylight into gloomy and dark precipitation stand out the most from the generally underwhelming graphics, while the overall audio is mostly unremarkable. The execution of the simulation aspects of Formula One seems off-base, and the lack of any way to play with friends prevents this from securing that prized position in the title.

Reflections: Do not be fooled by this game's name, *F1 Pole Position 64*, as it is of no relation to the lineage of the 1982 *Pole Position* from Namco – although a port of that version is available on the N64 as one of the titles included in *Namco Museum 64*. I feel Ubi Soft may have wanted to hide the lack of multiplayer support and regrets not adding it to the game because it is one of the few N64 games that does not list the number of players on the front of the box. – DK

European Cartridge

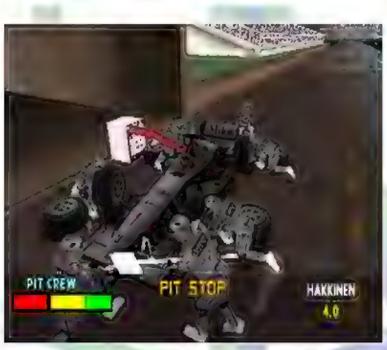
Japanese Cartridge
Human Grand Prix: The New Generation

F1 Racing Championship

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 2000
Region: BRA, PAL
Developer: Ubi Soft Paris Studios
Publisher: Video System
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆☆

Get behind the wheel as a real professional driver from the 1999 Formula One World Championship in this simulation-style racer, complete with a full license from the FIA and all of the tracks from the circuit. Slide into the driver's seat for a first-person perspective or toggle back to a third-person view from behind the vehicle; both display lap time, race position, current speed, vehicle condition, and pit status. Arcade or Simulation style gameplay is offered for all modes. Arcade features a time limit for stages, easier controls, and checkpoints, while Simulation focuses on longer races, pit stops, and realistic braking. However, extensive options allow customization for either mode. Some F1 beginners may welcome friendlier features – notably, automatic braking while turning and the ability to follow a "ghost" racer on an optimal path. However, there is still quite a challenge. A steep learning curve makes it a rough race for casual players, regardless of the mode chosen. Quick turns at high speeds will cause spin-outs, and too many collisions with or intentional nudging of other cars result in black flags or race-ending car fires. Modes include a quick start Pick Up & Play, Single Race, Championship (a multi-race challenge), Time Attack (no other racers on the track), and Duel (one-on-one showdown). Players can tweak races to be as short as five trips around the track or 50-lap marathons requiring multiple pit stops. Despite featuring 22 cars and the option to switch camera angles on the fly, races run visually smooth, an impressive technical feat. The trade-off to this welcome fluidity is an eight- to 15-second loading screen before a race starts. This experience will satisfy the cravings of those seeking an accurate recreation of the challenge, endurance, and nerves of steel required in the actual F1 circuit.

Reflections: This sequel to *Monaco Grand Prix* abandoned that naming convention after Ubi Soft obtained the license to use all F1 circuit track names. After the initial European release, *F1 Racing Championship* was released in Brazil in 2001 in NTSC-U format, but not in North America, making it a rarity in the N64 library. However, the European version is less obscure. Both versions are practically identical because the cart is multi-language, but the Brazilian variant included a Portuguese language manual and box. Between 2000 and 2001, PS1, PS2, Dreamcast, and PC versions were all released, which were more abundant and offered the same gameplay. Ubi Soft released one more game in the series without the FIA license. The 2002 release for the PC and PS2 reverted to the series' original title of *Racing Simulation 3*, despite being the series' fourth game. None of this is confusing in the slightest, of course. – SG

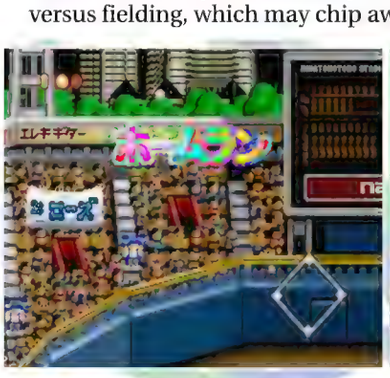


European Cartridge

Famista 64

[Family Stadium 64]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

This cutesy and stylized baseball title lets players take charge of 12 professional Japanese and two fictionalized ones (Americans and team Namco) in 2D and 3D perspectives. At-bats are rendered in full 3D (the camera behind the batter) with simple, cartoonish player models and 12 impressive-looking stadiums. In the batter's box, the Control Stick moves closer or further away from the plate while pressing A swings or Z bunts to attempt contact with the ball. On the pitching mound, the perspective is behind the plate. The A button delivers the pitch, and the analog stick controls the speed and movement of the ball. Batting and pitching both feel great, thanks to fluid animations, a quick pace, and high framerates. Fielding, however, is a different story. After a ball is hit, the perspective switches to a 2D overhead one that slows the play to a snail's pace. Fielders' movements are clunky, and the camera is too close to the ball, which turns snagging routine ground balls into unnecessarily awkward challenges and tracking fly balls into a nightmare. While the 2D environments look pleasant in their own right, the difference between them and the 3D ones feels like two different games stitched together. Available modes include a quick game, full season, tournament, or two-versus-two co-op game. There is also a campaign based around a map of Japan where the player competes in a series of baseball-themed mini-games to recruit other players to their club, all to challenge an invading alien force in nine innings to decide the fate of the Earth. While a fun idea, it is not particularly engaging since the mini-games lose their luster fast, and navigating the map is aggravating because it uses the same movement and perspective as fielding. Overall, replayability on the diamond will rely on how well pitching and batting can hold interest versus fielding, which may chip away at that initial enjoyment.



Reflections: If *Famista 64* looks and sounds a lot like *R.B.I. Baseball* for the NES, well, that's because it technically is. This title was conceived as a remake of that 8-bit game, known as *Pro Yakyū: Family Stadium* in Japan (the first in the Family Stadium series), and retained most of its strengths and weaknesses. Pitching and batting, while simple, feels better than ever with the transition into 3D, and the cartoonish look carries over nicely. However, the 2D fielding is frustrating and jarring. It seems even worse for wear compared to something like *Major League Baseball Featuring Ken Griffey Jr.*, released in North America a few months later, which was closer to what baseball games were developing into. – NT

FIFA '99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts Canada
Ported by: Software Creations
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

Play as and compete against over 250 teams in a series of brilliant, fast-paced soccer showdowns. Matches are viewed from a bird's eye, broadcast-style point of view, with the player taking control of a single player at a time and switching between others at the press of a button. Controls are tight, responsive, and easy to learn. Soccer basics are available, like passing and shooting, but for players looking to improve their game (or show off), there are advanced maneuvers such as bicycle kicks and headers. The AI is solid overall but often too defensive, making it easy to run out the clock when ahead on goals (though this may be offset by a multiplayer mode that supports up to four people). Quick Start allows the saving of two teams and a custom ruleset to a Controller Pak and jumping into a Friendly Match game right from the main menu. The most substantial game mode is European Dream League, where 20 European teams compete to be the best across a series of matches. There is also a simple Training mode that lets players cut their teeth on friendly, low-stakes matches and Golden Goal Match, where scoring to a set goal total (1-10) results in a victory. Strangely, not all available teams are fully licensed, particularly those from outside Europe (Brazilian league teams are the only non-European teams to be fully licensed). Season Mode allows the playing of a dozen national leagues (England, France, USA, etc.), and European Cup tournaments are available. Creating a personalized League or Cup where players can choose the teams, the number of matches, and even the starting month of play is also possible. Graphics look fantastic, with models capable of rudimentary facial animations, while stadiums and weather look phenomenal. Audio match commentary is natural and reactive, with impressive reactions based on whatever is happening on the field. This noteworthy soccer title is an easy recommendation for newcomers and long-time fans alike.

Reflections: *FIFA '99* is great, but it feels like it foreshadows the series's direction: continuous updates to rosters and not much in the way of new mechanics or adding polish to existing ones. This notion may be a little unfair since *FIFA '99* adds quite a bit over *FIFA: Road to World Cup 98* (notably, the ability to create custom leagues), but where Road was a revelation, *FIFA '99* is an incremental improvement. It seems the FIFA series continued to take smaller and smaller steps after *Road* until it eventually stumbled, even if it wasn't so apparent at the time. – RR

UK Cartridge

French Cartridge

German Cartridge

Spanish Cartridge

FIFA Soccer 64

FIFA 64 (EU)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Extended Play Productions
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

This licensed soccer simulation features an impressive 150 playable teams representing five different leagues. During play, the camera sits at an almost isometric angle (loosely matching broadcast footage) as control is of whichever team player is nearest to the ball. Passing, shooting, dribbling, running, and tackling occur using one of two different control schemes: Simple, which utilizes quick button taps, or Complex, which instead involves holding buttons and offers some more advanced control features. No matter which scheme is selected, the controls feel very unresponsive. After pressing a button, there is a noticeable delay before a character takes action, which can be annoying at best and disastrous at worst. The player can manage their team before a game by selecting positions, formations, and general strategies (offensive, defensive, or balanced). These affect how the AI behaves during play, but the differences can seem minor in practice. Match settings let players choose from Action, Arcade, or Simulation styles at any time. Action increases the action and increases the players' attributes. Arcade levels the playing field, making all players around even in stats like speed, shot power, and ball control, but it exaggerates ball physics. Simulation bases player stats on their real-world counterparts. Game type and other options like play length and pitch condition are available in single and multiplayer action for up to four, so everyone can join the same team and play as their soccer heroes. Single-player match offerings include a League Mode to compete as a team to try and win a season, with the option to both play and simulate games. Also offered are Tournament Mode, Playoff Mode, and Friendly Mode (quick matches). Soccer fans will likely have a good time with this title, as the licensed players, realistic stats, and wealth of multiplayer modes are enjoyable. Graphics and sound effects are acceptable (crowd noises and chants are pleasing), and the play-by-play announcing is sparse but not distracting. The time on the pitch here may not accomplish anything new or innovative, but the basics are worth it to attempt a shot on goal.

Reflections: While I had a lot more fun with *FIFA Soccer 64* than I expected, many fans were disappointed at its release time, as they considered it a step down from the previous FIFA title, *FIFA International Soccer*, for the Sega Genesis. This disappointment seemed mainly due to the sluggish controls, which I found annoying but didn't consider an outright fun killer. Reportedly, pre-orders for *FIFA Soccer 64* were so high that Electronic Arts reconsidered its decision to pull out of Nintendo 64 development. EA went on to develop several more FIFA games for the console, so if you're a fan of those later releases, you have the FIFA community to thank. – RR

European Cartridge
FIFA 64

FIFA: Road to World Cup 98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts Canada
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Boasting 172 licensed teams with 6,400 players – all accurate to real-world rosters – as well as several different game modes, this bird's-eye-view soccer sim is packed with enough content to occupy even the most die-hard soccer fans. On top of having an absurd number of professionals and teams, players can create a dream lineup by buying, trading, or creating custom athletes. The main draw is the titular Road to World Cup mode; pick an international team and play through the qualifiers up to the World Cup. It's regular soccer, through and through, but having a clear goal in sight keeps the player motivated and invested. Aside from this mode, there's also Penalty Shootout, in which one or two players take turns to take close-range shots; League mode, where one player picks from one of 11 leagues and plays through a season; and Training mode, where play is simply for the sake of practice, which is a great way to get the ball rolling (so to speak). While it's not a distinct mode, playing indoor games with smaller teams is possible, making for tighter, more intense matches. The action plays just fine with the basic controls – passing between players with good timing, sprinting when necessary, and shooting when the opportunity presents itself. Top players can use advanced abilities such as headers, volley passes, and bicycle kicks, which are admittedly more stylish than useful but can make or break the occasional game. Unfortunately, poor AI detracts from an otherwise remarkable experience. Goalie AI is atrocious and often runs out into the field and misses the ball entirely. Other players will attempt ridiculous long shots or pass at bizarre times, which breaks immersion and makes the game far easier than it needs to be. These faults are somewhat remedied by multiplayer for up to four players, but when fighting for a place in the World Cup, it's disappointing to lose (or win) because of poor decision-making by the AI. Despite that shortcoming, this is a very good title with much to offer soccer fans, and maybe even enough to sway those not yet invested in the sport.

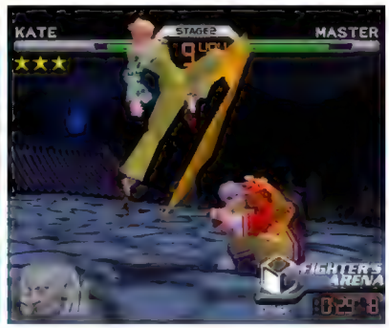
Reflections: I was surprised at the quality of *FIFA: Road to World Cup 98*. For a soccer title that's more than 20 years old, it still plays very well. The controls are silky-smooth, plenty of modes and options to check out, and the production quality is much higher than most games from the era. It's not hard to see how the FIFA series became (and remained) such a powerhouse with a relatively early entry of this caliber. Though there isn't much of it, it's also worth mentioning that this is the first FIFA game to include a licensed soundtrack, including "Song 2" from Blur as the theme music (which feels quintessentially '90s). – RR

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

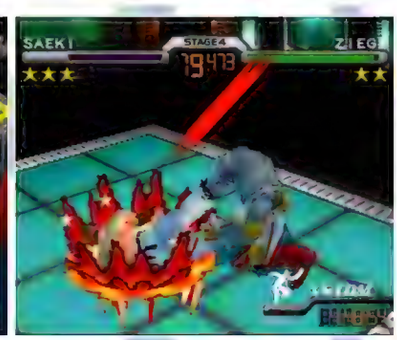
Fighter Destiny 2

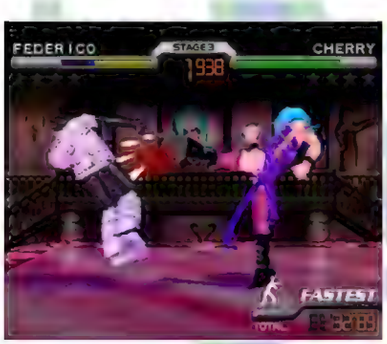
Fighting Tradition: F-Cup Maniax (JP)
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: June 2000
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Opus, Genki
Publisher: SouthPeak Interactive (NA), Imagineer (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆☆



It's time to prove who is the champion of the ring! Punch, kick, and grapple through this 2.5D polygonal fighter that offers a fresh take on the normal beatdowns. Select from one of 11 starting characters (with five to unlock) and rush into the standard mode, where the first fighter to seven stars wins in a timed bout. Most techniques performed on these squared platforms are realistic attacks: quick punches, roundhouse kicks, vicious headbutts, jumping attacks, etc. Forcing opponents out can be a solid attack option, but knocking an opponent from the platform only earns a single star. However, mind games and clever maneuvering become equivalent to a victory. Throwing an opponent to the mat nets two stars, knocking them out rewards three, while pulling off tricky special moves showers four stars upon the clever brawler. Is it best to rush in and pummel the other fighter to try for three stars, or play it safe and wait for a throw? Go the full 30 seconds and earn a single point from a judge's decision, or risk it all and push the offensive for a satisfying four-star special? The choice is in the player's hands, made more so with excellent customization options that allow all match settings, including point rewards, match time, and ring size, to be changed. There is also the option to remap the controller functions based on the player's preferences. Is the right choice of combatant an all-arounder like Saeki? How about the speed of Meiling, the kung fu master? Maybe power with the half-man, half-machine Ziege? Or could victory be with Cherry, the unlockable "trashy flashy fighter"? There is a magnificent personality on display in these characters, even if the stages themselves are nothing more than raised square platforms. Combos feel great to land, and most matches come down to cleverness rather than button mashing, equalling a satisfying experience. There are few music tracks to hum along to, but there is solid sound design. If the traditional versus mode grows stale, extra modes available include Rodeo (stay in the ring as long as possible against Mou the cow), Fastest (beat challengers quickly), Survival (do not lose a match), and the Fighter's Arena. In this board-game-like mode, players earn new character techniques by beating the Master. With so much to unlock and an approachable game mechanic that rewards dedicated players, this brawler pulls off a real four-star special.

Reflections: That is not a typo; the sequel to *Fighters Destiny* did drop the "s" due to legal reasons. However, why the main character's name changed from Ryuji to Saeki remains a mystery. While the fighting game scene was becoming saturated with combo-heavy anime fighters, fatality-laden mature fighters, and technical weapons fighters, this was refreshingly different, with likable characters and a unique mechanic in the star-based scoring system. The only real shame is that not a single bit of backstory or lore was added to flesh out the game's world. Spending more time with this cast of fighters would have been a joy. Either way, there is so much to enjoy here with a friend or solo that it is a shame this hidden gem slipped by fighting game fans. – CPr





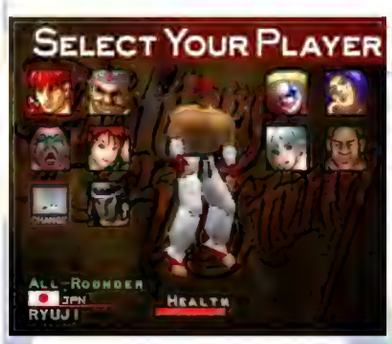
Japanese Cartridge
Fighting Tradition: F-Cup Maniax

Fighters Destiny

Fighting Cup (JP)
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Jan. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Opus, Genki, Anchor
Publisher: Ocean Software (NA), Imagineer (JP), Infogrames (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Forget a story – it's time to throw down! Select from one of nine polygonal combatants (with five more to unlock) and charge toward victory in this 2.5D fighter. At the core are simple punches, kicks, throws, and blocks, but a deep combat system offers great risk/reward situations that feel fluid enough for newcomers and veteran fighting game players. The first to score seven points is the match-winner. A judge's decision (highest score at the end of 30 seconds) or knocking an opponent out of the ring nets only a single point, but throwing combatants to the ground earns two. Knocking fighters unconscious rewards three points, and successfully pulling off a special move – such as Abdul's Flying Fish From Hell technique or Tomahawk's Giant Swing – delivers four points. Within this system is ample strategy as scuffles regularly see unexpected comebacks, thanks partly to the ability to not only break out of a two-point throw but also a fighter's ability to counter a throw with one of their own. Opponents can execute a devastating reversal of fortune in some situations. A fighter may be left with a sliver of health, only to have them yank their foe off the stage and steal the victory, which can feel more exhilarating than frustrating on the receiving end. Stages are small and essentially just raised squares with different backdrops, but they are sufficient. The real focus is on the characters and moves, which look great. The starring character Ryuji has straightforward one-hit-KO moves, while the tricky clown Pierre is unorthodox. Trade speed for power and extra health with the Brazilian powerhouse Bob or the American grappler Tomahawk, or go for some quickness with the simply-named Ninja or the Chinese martial artist Meiling. Of special note are the custom game settings that allow players to change point values, match length, ring size, and fully remap their controller, including using the Control Stick and deciding the radius for diagonal inputs. The sound design works to build hype when strikes land and points are scored, though the soundtrack lacks any real hits. Other modes include VS COM (fight ten in a row with unlimited continues), Record Attack (survival endless opponents), Fastest (demands to fight quickly), and Rodeo (endurance test against the unlockable Ushi the cow). Finally, Master Challenge is a face-off against the unlockable Master and Joker; each Master defeated earns a new character skill, but losing to Joker erases them all. Testing one's might against friends is very satisfying as mind games abound in each bout. With an exciting combat system, extra modes, and unlockable characters, this different breed of fighting game hits hard.

Reflections: It's a treat to see something unique from the fighting genre, so basing matches on a point system rather than a health bar is a ton of fun. The amount of control customization and match settings allows you and your friends to morph the game into your own house rules, such as favoring only ring-outs or special moves. *Fighters Destiny* is a sleeper gem that fighting fans should not pass up. – CPr



European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Fighting Cup

Fighting Force 64

Genre: Beat 'em Up
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Core Design
Publisher: Crave Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

This port of the 1997 PlayStation beat 'em up has players trading blows with the diabolical Dr. Dex Zeng and his team of cronies who are attempting to bring on the apocalypse. The 3D action is in a third-person perspective where the camera automatically moves with the fisticuffs. Players choose from four brawlers: Hawk Manson, Ben "Smasher" Jackson, Mace Daniels, and Alana McKendricks. Hawk and Mace are good all-around fighters who control very similarly. Ben is a hulking but slow brute who deals large amounts of damage, and Alana is quick on her feet but has the weakest attacks. Characters have basic kicking and punching attacks, and each has a special move that can take out multiple enemies at once but comes at the cost of health. Depending on the character, some button combos perform suplexes, shoulder throws, and other wrestling maneuvers. Players can go solo, but for the whole experience, a friend can join for cooperative play. The story spans seven stages, featuring city streets, a subway, a construction site, a naval base, and other locations. Some stages branch out, making multiple playthroughs a must to see everything. Street punks fill the alleys and subways, and secret service-like agents and cyborgs patrol Zeng's base, all of whom are just waiting to be pummeled. The real fun comes from breakable objects that litter each stage. Almost everything on the screen can be smashed, usually revealing a health pickup or a weapon. Some of the weapons players can wield to take out enemies include steel bars, axes, tires, grenades, guns, and rocket launchers. The overall gameplay feels sluggish. Moving a fighter around the environment is a chore, especially when controlling the larger character, Ben. Combat, although visually rewarding, feels unsatisfying. Punches and kicks seem to be missing that gratifying "oomph" that a good brawler needs. The visuals are pleasing, especially the subway stage filled with grime and graffiti, but the music is entirely forgettable. This standard-fare slugfest's frustrations outweigh its benefits.

Reflections: The beat 'em up genre is a favorite of mine, so I was excited to play through *Fighting Force 64*. Everything starts off well initially, but then the slow character movement sets in and quickly hampers enjoyment. The highlights here are the stages, which all have their own feel. City streets are filled with hotdog vendor carts, which, when broken, reveal… hotdogs! When I finally reached the elevator stage (a genre staple), I was momentarily hyped – which came to a screeching halt when I realized that enemies couldn't be knocked off of it. Why even make an elevator stage if the enemies can't be thrown off? – MV

European Cartridge

Flying Dragon

Hiryū no Ken Twin (JP)
[Fist of the Flying Dragon Twin]
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: July 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Culture Brain
Pub.: Natsume (NA, PAL), Culture Brain (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Grab a gi and strike the cockiest fighting pose; it is time for an exciting martial arts showdown! This side-view 3D polygonal fighting title offers a great variety, featuring two distinctive games in one package. First, the "SD" option has the player choose from eight different super-deformed (chibi) styled characters to eliminate the other seven contenders in hand-to-hand combat. These brawlers may look cute, but they pack a punch (not to mention kicks, combos, and patented special moves specific to each fighter). Choose from competitors like Ryuhi, Powers, or Yuka and prove their fighting superiority by winning two out of three rounds against every rival. In SD, players earn special items or collect prize money to spend on flashy accessories designed to boost offensive or defensive abilities. Collectibles include the Robe of Life (restores HP during battle), the Power Band (worn to weaken rivals against throws), and the Wolf Fang (grants invulnerability against certain attacks). Two hundred total available items add a lot of depth to the proceedings as players vie to improve their character's stats to build the ultimate fighter. In Virtual mode, players battle a line-up of characters with more realistic proportions. Red Falcon, Gengai, and Min-Min are among the eight selectable warriors, with a couple of additional unlockable fighters for those who earn it. There is no leveling-up with items, just pure fighting-game fisticuffs via punching, kicking, throwing, and a flurry of fancy special moves like pyrotechnic projectiles and energy-infused magical strikes. Fights can occur on a horizontal 2D plane or a 3D field, allowing for greater maneuverability. The action can get intense, but Practice mode allows players to familiarize themselves with each fighter's nuances and move sets before officially entering the ring. Multiplayer fighting is available in both SD and Virtual, with SD allowing players to load characters (and their items) from the Controller Pak. The music throughout is not particularly memorable, but it is suitably cheery and bright to match the colorful anime graphics. This fighting game has something for everyone, from cool karate kids and quirky hair colors to cyborg ninjas and bombastic wrestlers! Testing one's might against friends is very satisfying as mind games abound in each bout. With an exciting combat system, extra modes, and unlockable characters, this different breed of fighting game hits hard.

Reflections: It's a bit sluggish sometimes, but this well-rounded title offers some fluid fighting. Players can dash, jump, throw projectiles, unleash special moves, and chain combos, making for a fairly fun fighter, pound for pound! One glaring problem with the combat is that a downed opponent stays on the ground for too long. It's difficult to build a rhythm or acclimate to Flying Dragon's timing when waiting for your enemy to get back on their feet for five seconds at a clip! These mid-battle catnaps really throw me off. They snooze, and I lose. – DM

European Cartridge

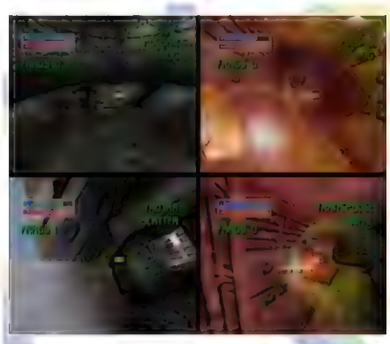
Japanese Cartridge
Hiryū no Ken Twin

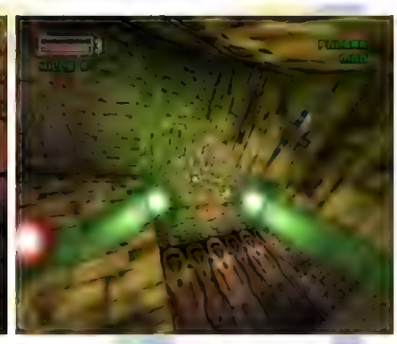
Forsaken 64

Forsaken (EU)
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: May 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana UK
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

In 2113, an experiment gone wrong turns Earth's Mechanoid Defense Force (MDF) against itself, ultimately slaughtering everyone and transforming the planet into a lifeless husk. In this futuristic first-person shooter, players join the Forsaken, a team sent to Earth to destroy the MDF and any rival mercenaries that get in their way. Players will have eight characters to choose from (an additional eight are unlockable), each piloting their own anti-gravity "pioncycle" with different attributes. These nimble aircraft can travel in any direction or axis around the map thanks to their physics-defying technology. From the pilot's perspective, the first-person view and the simple controls mean the pioncycles handle quite easily – the forward and backward buttons (A button and B button, respectively) propel the vehicle, the C-buttons strafe, and the Control Stick looks around in any direction. Navigating through the post-apocalyptic wasteland, however, can be extremely confusing. Most stages are large tunnel systems, which break off into other tunnel systems that usually lead to a locked door; backtracking through the labyrinthine design to locate a switch to progress is not uncommon. In some cases, there are colored lights to help the player navigate, but these are too few and far between. Of course, plenty of deadly MDF assets lurk throughout these tunnels. These come in the form of stationary turrets and grounded and flying robots. Thankfully, the pioncycle comes with a shield, primary weapons (laser and bullet-types), and secondary weapons (missiles and mines) that can be upgraded by picking up items dropped by enemies. Most stages require players to kill a set amount of enemies to advance to the next stage. Some require defending or collecting pieces of equipment, and others task them with dropping a bomb in a specific area and then escaping. The best stages are big arenas filled with huge tank-like boss robots that the player must destroy. The amazing synth soundtrack is a real highlight, helping players endure some of the longer or tougher areas. Besides the single-player campaign, up to four players can compete in last-man-standing and highest-frag count multiplayer duels. Even if the scenery doesn't change much, this vehicular shooter is a great change of scenery for the system.

Reflections: I genuinely wanted to love *Forsaken 64*, but the confusing tunnel mazes had me pulling my hair out. It doesn't help that the tunnels all look exactly the same, although some sections are color-coded by lights. Those lights were a great idea development-wise, but they were only in small areas, usually where tunnels forked into other tunnels. (Notice that I'm saying tunnels a lot?) The music, on the other hand, is simply outstanding! In a way, the soundtrack helped me get through tunnel after tunnel after tunnel. I never grew tired of it. – MV





European Cartridge

FOX Sports College Hoops '99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA
Developer: Z-Axis
Publisher: Fox Interactive
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

This five-on-five college basketball simulation features an NCAA license with 120 official college programs, along with non-customizable NCAA rules for the 1998-99 season, including two halves of play, a 35-second shot clock, and a 19'9" three-point arc. Six camera options have varying degrees of zoom from horizontal and vertical perspectives. Close-up cameras show distinctive player facial and body characteristics and individual names and numbers on jerseys. However, real player names aren't used per NCAA guidelines. Beware, as some cameras produce noticeably choppy animation that hinders play. The controls use nearly every button available for advanced mechanics like changing offensive and defensive plays during regulation, attempting pump fakes, and properly timing spin moves that drive to the basket. On the downside, two passing buttons – one for the nearest player and the other for an open player – often result in inadvertently turning a pass of the ball into a steal by an opposing player. The primary Exhibition mode sets up a game between two teams for up to two players. Season offers a full-length season, the post-season of a conference tournament, and the 64-team NCAA Tournament played from the beginning or just the final two rounds. Manual substitutions aren't an option, but auto-substitutions do occur when players run into foul trouble. Some of those fouls will bring on free throw situations where a player attempts an unguarded shot gauged by an intuitive accuracy meter that varies in speed depending on the player's free throw rating. The FOX Sports license brings a slick presentation with its theme music on the menus and FOX banners donning the arenas. A couple of generic college fight songs play while driving up the court, so the college pageantry suffers by not having the official school anthems. It doesn't help that there is no in-game commentary, and the in-arena announcer has limited calls. While there is a decent game of college hoops here, it suffers from a lack of customization, diminished graphics, and overall bland sound.

Reflections: As the sole college sports release on the Nintendo 64, I thought it was a missed opportunity for official college anthems, graphical tournament brackets, and college mascots/cheerleaders to be utterly absent from *FOX Sports College Hoops '99*. I can play any basketball game to get my fix, but if I want that NCAA touch, don't hold back! There's an interesting point of trivia where a player can enter a code to turn off the crowd, replacing it with an empty background reminiscent of the very good *NCAA Basketball* on SNES. I'm unsure if this was an intentional homage or an accidental tribute, but I appreciated the nod either way. – DK

Fushigi no Dungeon: Fūrai no Shiren 2: Oni Shūrai! Shiren-jō!

[Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer 2: Oni Invasion! Shiren Castle]
Genre: RPG, Strategy
Release Date: Sept. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Chunsoft
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆

Shiren and his companion, Koppa, are on their travels when they come across a village in dire need of protection from the nearby Oni clan that persistently invades and wreaks havoc. The town decides to construct an indestructible castle. It tasks Shiren with building it by searching for materials in three nearby, multi-floored trails assigned easy, middle, and hard difficulties, ranging from 10-15 floors each. This roguelike RPG is played from a top-down perspective. An opening tutorial nicely lays out the fundamentals. Shiren starts every new trek at character level one and gains experience points unique to each labyrinth. Combat is turn-based – adversaries only move when Shiren does, and each takes turns attacking the other. Shiren has many offensive options, with melee weapons like clubs and swords or scrolls that cast magical spells like lightning and flame-based attacks. If Shiren perishes, he loses all items, experience, currency, and equipment and respawns back in the village. Each of the three dungeons has a halfway and summit area after the final boss where players can sell accumulated items, construct castle parts, and reorganize their limited inventory spaces. As players reach higher floors on tougher dungeons, they will encounter more formidable foes like towering Rock Beasts and dreadful Demon Scorpions and likely stumble onto punishing traps like a health-depleting landmine. Throughout play, new abilities like synthesizing items with enhanced effects and recruiting allies to assist in Shiren's quest are introduced, opening up new ways to approach combat. This intentionally brutal gameplay may not be for everyone; expect to die repeatedly to practice new strategies. Learning and mastering the intricacies of this deceptively deep gameplay is immensely satisfying. The simple 2D sprites and environments are not mindblowing but effectively convey the tense action, while a suitable soundtrack sets the tone of warfare accordingly. While Shiren's adventure begins with roguelike training wheels, it evolves into agonizingly tough but fair gameplay that is irresistible to put down.

Reflections: The over-arching Mystery Dungeon series is a long-running franchise consisting of dungeon-crawling RPGs that incorporate properties such as Pokémon, Chocobo from the Final Fantasy series, and more. After wrapping up Shiren's primary story, several optional post-game dungeons await that all are at least 99 floors for a supreme roguelike experience. Also unlocking in the post-game is the Monster Kingdom museum, which tasks players to capture one of each enemy monster and bring them back. These optional post-game extras add many hours of replay value for completionists. Many Shiren games have been released, with this being a prequel to the Super Famicom original. I recommend fans either track down an English translation of this title or seek out the handful of North American Shiren games that came out for the DS, Wii, Vita, and Nintendo Switch. – DK

Gauntlet Legends

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

This hack-and-slash title breaks away from its dungeon-crawling arcade roots and into an expanded universe filled with fantasy-themed monsters and level-gaining heroes. Players take the role of one of four characters (Warrior, Valkyrie, Wizard, or Archer) summoned by a benevolent wizard, Sumner, to dispose of the evil demon Skorne. Travel to each of the four distinct worlds (mountain, castle, town, ice), viewed from a movable isometric top-down perspective, to battle hordes of monsters, defeat end-world bosses, and seek out obelisks that will unleash Sumner's full power. Each of the four heroes has unique talents and strengths that complement each other on a team, creating an ideal four-player experience. The Warrior excels in hand-to-hand combat; the well-rounded Valkyrie's armor is unmatched; the Wizard is adept at summoning powerful magic spells; the Archer is quick and can dish out damage from a distance. It takes thorough exploration to find the 13 Rune Stones that open the gateway to the underworld, where the final battle with Skorne occurs. The gameplay borrows elements from the arcade original, such as the search for keys and switches to unlock new areas in each level, treasure chests full of gold, and vast enemy generators that spit out foes endlessly. A new twist includes experience points that expand health totals, strength, armor, speed, and magic abilities. Use accrued gold to buy power-ups that increase weapon strength or provide additional unique powers to grow in size or shrink enemies, among others. Powerful new weapons and spells can be purchased and saved for later use, adding another new twist to the old formula. In single-player mode, the repetitive hack-and-slash can grow tiresome. Recruiting a friend or two can maximize the fun factor, creating a surprisingly captivating experience. Even without multiplayer in the picture, the sheer variety of nicely rendered environments combined with light puzzle elements in the level design gives this title considerable replay value.

Reflections: *Gauntlet Legends* excels in its mixture of past and present, appealing to players with a fondness for cooperative multiplayer and hearing lines such as "warrior needs food" in a deep, rumbling voice. I was giddy with excitement when the familiar aspects of gameplay (searching for keys and level exits, demolishing enemy spawn locations) appeared in all of their classic glory. I even smiled when I first encountered the most intimidating foe from the original, the indestructible Death. You know that a game has hit its nostalgic mark when it can provide the same fearsome adrenaline rush only by re-introducing a character that was synonymous with "game over." – JBr

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Getter Love!!: Chō Renai Party Game Tanjō

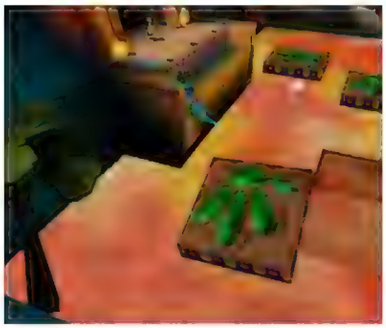
[Getter Love!!: Birth of a Love Party Game]
Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆

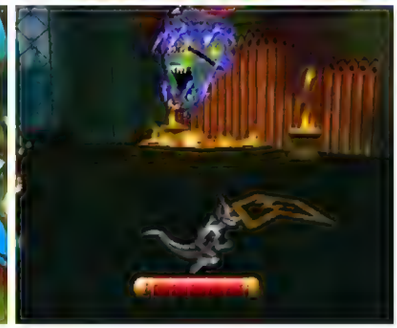
The player and three friends compete as teenage boys to get a girlfriend. Seven girls are available to woo by raising their love meter through regular interaction, all while keeping the other boys at bay. Each day has three rounds: morning, afternoon, and night. All four boys (either player or CPU-controlled) simultaneously select their destination in a top-down view of the brightly colored, cartoony Panda Town. As the boys' and girls' chibi sprites reach their desired locations, they take turns carrying out actions in first-person stills, much like a visual novel. Those activities include purchasing items, speaking to someone already present, or asking a girl on a date. If she agrees with the day, time, and place (activity) offered, the date happens if both parties follow through. At that rendezvous, conversations can transpire, increasing the boy's "love love," or romance, points with the girl. Other NPCs can also appear at random locations and affect the boys, for instance, by offering a job or starting a fight, reducing their appearance and stamina. If either bar gets too low, the boy must head home for a shower or nap to not risk a date automatically failing. When two boys meet at a location, one may choose to battle, resulting in one of three mini-games: controlling sprites scuffling for control of a karaoke microphone, answering quiz questions, or a paintball shooting battle in first-person. Winners raise their meters, and losers are punished in kind. At the end of each day, Alfonso, an NPC who also acts as emcee, reveals the state of all the love meters, represented by hearts by each girl's head. When one of the boys (player or CPU) thinks they have enough of a girl's love, they can confess their feelings to her. If successful, they are awarded one of three endings based on the girl's love meter's height. However, if it has grown enough, the girl confesses her love instead, earning the fourth and best ending. While the conversations and gameplay are not deep, the excitement comes from outpacing opponents or directly affecting them negatively, like spreading a nasty rumor. This fun take on the dating simulator genre has plenty of scenes and information to collect (as conversation topics). However, the multiplayer mode, with ways to annoy and disadvantage friends, can turn anyone into a fan.

Reflections: This game is sometimes referred to as *Getter Love!!: Panda Love Unit*, since that is what is denoted on the title screen. As much of a fan of dating sims as I am, the "party game" aspect of *Getter Love!* made me wary. Additionally, not knowing Japanese makes this an uncertain game to jump into, but with a translation program and patience, it's worth the effort! While I usually find myself getting invested in the story and background of the characters in a dating sim, the competitiveness here really pulled me in. Plus, having open knowledge of all the moves and interactions makes strategizing all the more fun! This title is one that I'll definitely replay to earn the best ending with all the girls and, yes, beat down some rival high school boys in the process. – KY

Gex 3: Deep Cover Gecko

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Ported by: Gratuitous Games
Publisher: Crave Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆





Snarky secret agent Gex the Gecko bounces out of his secret high-tech GexCave to rescue his partner, Agent Xtra, from the vile clutches of the evil Rez. To do so, he must clear a series of TV- and movie-themed worlds, collecting remote controls until the final confrontation with Rez aboard the entity's space station. A third-person camera chases the gecko action as he runs, jumps, and whips his way through foes. Gex handles erratically, with little nuance to the Control Stick movement, which could result in running or coming to a total standstill. It is easy to fall into the trap of circling items rather than collecting them or running off the edge of cliffs before having the chance to press the jump button. His attacks are basic, with a whip of the tail and a jumping kick that is difficult to aim, but his various costumes within the levels provide some variety to his movement. For example, in the fairy tale world, where Gex dresses as Little Red Riding Hood, he can use the cape to glide down from a jump, and his hook hand allows him to slide down ropes like zip lines in the pirate world. Gex can also smash TVs through the levels to release colorful power-up flies for health, extra lives, or the ability to burn, freeze, or slime enemies. The worlds are fanciful, ranging from fairy tales and a winter holiday-themed world to anime, each offering a different costume and set of wisecracking voice lines for Gex to help set the mood. Each level has four remotes to collect, which unlock more levels: three unlock by achieving unique objectives, such as smashing blood coolers or defeating an evil Santa Claus, and a fourth by collecting the 100 fly coins scattered throughout. Also hidden within the stages are bonus coins that allow Gex to enter Bonus TVs to attempt to complete timed objectives for extra lives and paw coins that add extra hits to Gex's health. A handful of creative boss fights round out the experience, with an especially well-crafted parody of *The Wizard of Oz* appearing. The visuals are pretty to look at but suffer from some framerate drops that can be frustrating when combined with the sometimes stubborn controls and forgettable sound. That aside, the simple joy of collecting items and unlocking more levels is satisfying. While corny and a bit too frequent, Gex's one-liners join with the attractive graphics and well-designed gameplay to provide a fun diversion and a worthwhile entry in the genre.

Reflections: *Gex 3* is a more refined experience than its predecessor, *Gex 64*, with a few new tricks tossed in. Unfortunately, it's a bit of a mixed bag. The camera is improved but remains difficult to wrangle, often making traversing the levels more complicated than it needs to be. The added whimsy of stages in which Gex drives a tank to blast other tanks or rides in a kangaroo's pouch to hit ten bells makes for a more entertaining experience than *Gex 64: Enter the Gecko* and compensates somewhat for the performance issues. – CW

European Cartridge

Gex 64: Enter the Gecko

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Ported by: Realtime Associates
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

TV-loving lounge lizard Gex comes out of retirement to put a stop to the plans of the evil Rez once and for all in this lighthearted third-person 3D platformer. Gex must climb, jump, collect, and spring through 14 regular and seven bonus levels to reach and defeat the diabolical cyborg mastermind. Each takes its cues from a TV or movie genre; Cartoons, horror, martial arts, and sci-fi are all represented brightly and energetically. The levels are divided into individual missions (completed separately) to collect red remotes that unlock new areas. When Gex enters a level, select which objective to complete, such as smashing all of the purple mushrooms hidden within or making it through a gauntlet of axe-wielding suits of armor. Success will award a red remote. The camera has three settings: Manual, Automatic, and Semi-automatic. None of them are easy to cope with, but each has moments where it proves helpful in spotting collectibles or evading hazards. Enemies in each stage are themed appropriately, with a hunter sneaking around looking for prey, an evil doll, or a Tiki mask-wearing trio of bosses. Gex fights these enemies by slapping them with his tail or launching a jump kick, or he can climb on certain surfaces to reach hidden areas and avoid foes. There is no lock-on mechanic in combat, so it is sometimes easy to sail right past an enemy, fall from a great height, and have to climb back upward. Gex can also smash TVs to release different colored flies to eat with the R button. These can restore health, in the case of the green flies, or they can grant extra attack abilities, such as using the blue flies to freeze one's foes or the red to burn them. The player can even let the flies circle Gex instead, where they act as an extra hit point. Throughout each stage are collectible objects themed to the world. Collecting a certain number of each one advances to the next tier of collectibles, with the top tier rewarding a silver remote. Acquiring enough silver remotes opens up bonus stages where players earn gold remotes by collecting or smashing certain objects within a set time limit. Overall, this is a solid title with good graphics, a fun atmosphere, and just enough attitude to get some laughs.

Reflections: Gex's personality shines through despite the somewhat repetitive nature of his spoken lines throughout the adventure. The camera is nowhere near as good as in some of the best games in the genre; playing with it occasionally resembled trying to steer a speeding grocery cart full of gelatin. The FMV cutscenes from other versions are missing here, taking important story beats with them, though in exchange, it received a unique level in Sea Span. While not as polished or refined as *Super Mario 64* or *Banjo-Kazooie*, fans of collect-a-thon 3D platformers, TV references, and pop culture mashups will definitely want to tune in. – CW

European Cartridge

Glover

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Interactive Studios
Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

A magic glove must return seven crystals to the castle to save the kingdom in this cartoonish 3D platformer. Once locating a crystal, Glover must guide it to the end of the stage by pushing, slapping, bouncing, or walking on top of it. There are three modes to choose from: Time Trial, Practice, and Story. Story mode consists of six themed worlds (Atlantis, Carnival, Pirate, Prehistoric, Fortress of Fear, and Out of this World), each containing three levels and an unlockable bonus stage. The carnival world, in particular, is a joy to explore and is full of charming carnival-like mini-games. Glover has a few tricks he can utilize while traversing the kingdom. He can jump up and perform a fist slam, cartwheel through small openings, and use obtainable magic spells that grant Herculean strength and other extraordinary powers. Most areas are conquered by activating switches, requiring some moderate puzzle-solving. To clear these obstacles, Glover can magically transform the crystal into different objects (bowling ball, ball bearing, or a rubber ball), each with different abilities. For example, the bowling ball can break weak walls, and the rubber ball can float on water and bounce to higher platforms. Glover has a health gauge that depletes when touched by the various overly-cute enemies like bumble bees and floating elephants. However, collecting ten magical cards called Garibs will replenish the gauge. Collecting 50 Garibs awards additional lives, and collecting all Garibs in an area will unlock that area's bonus stage. Glover's over-sensitive controls while guiding a crystal are incredibly stiff, and the slightest mistake will have players falling off the stage to their deaths. The camera is usually positioned behind Glover and can be controlled with the C-buttons to take in all the obstacles. Still, it often sets itself behind walls and at other frustrating angles. The charming visuals, excellent music, and spectacular boss battles are enjoyable but can't quite compensate for the wonky camera and stiff controls.

Reflections: This anxiety-filled platformer brings back my worst memories of playing *Marble Madness* (Atari Games, 1984). In both games, you guide a ball across a narrow ledge, and I sweat bullets the entire time. Now reverse the *Marble Madness* controls; that's how you move Glover when riding on top of a crystal. Pretty horrible, right? This control method usually only has to be done when moving across a body of water, but that doesn't make it any less frustrating. Conquering difficult stages feels gratifying, but if it weren't for fun boss battles and catchy tunes, there really wouldn't be a reason to push through *Glover*. – MV

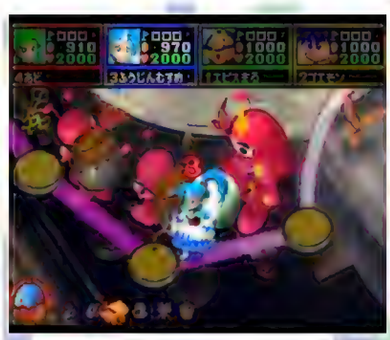
European Cartridge

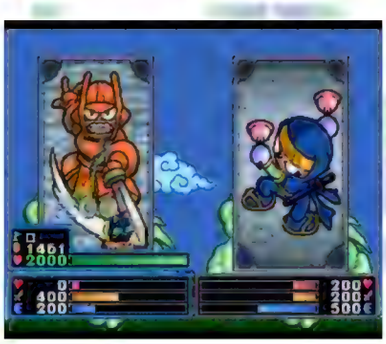
Goemon Mononoke Sugoroku

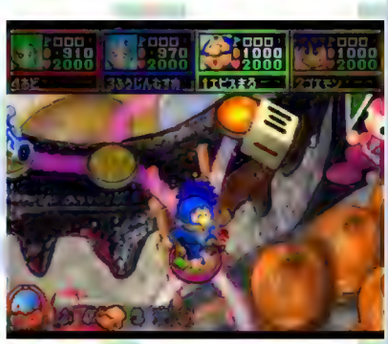
Genre: Board Game
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Kobe
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

The popular Goemon video game series is the basis for this card-fighting board game. After selecting one of four characters (Goemon, Ebisumaru, Yae, or Sasuke) and seven stages from locations in the series' history (such as Odeo Town and Mt. Fuji), players participate in a 3D board game where the last player standing wins. Each turn begins by drawing a new card (status, monster, or battle) to add to the player's hand. Using a status card will improve a monster card's stats while reducing an opponent's. A dice roll determines movement on the isometric board and a monster card placement location. Battle mode begins if a player lands on the same space inhabited by a monster card. These battles occur on a separate screen, and the monster stats (body, strength, speed) help determine the winner. Use a battle card to increase a monster's stats before engaging, as winners take precious coins and HP from the loser. Coins are an essential currency for raising a monster card's level, moving them to a new board location, or using any status or battle cards in a player's possession. If a monster loses a match and the amount of damage doled out by the opponent is greater than the monster's HP, the owner's character absorbs the extra damage. A character is eliminated when they lose all their HP. One-player story mode advances through seven pre-rendered boards, each with a unique layout and theme, all while unlocking additional playable characters. A tactical approach is required to win, as cards must be smartly deployed to power up monsters or make calculated moves to ensure taking on opponents' weaker monsters before they can develop their strengths. An interesting extra is the ability to link the Game Boy Color RPG *Ganbare Goemon: Mononoke Dochu Tobidase Nabe-Bugyo!* and transfer unique monsters to boost the available roster. Gamers looking for action may not appreciate the passive nature of this board game, but the nice-looking environments and a deep rule set prevent it from becoming tedious.

Reflections: Before playing this title, the Goemon franchise, known as Mystical Ninja outside of Japan, was new to me. *Mononoke Sugoroku* is an outlier, as the other titles have more action-adventure-style gameplay. Monster cards give it a very Pokémon-like feel, which makes sense considering how huge the phenomenon was in 1999. A deep and complicated ruleset with abundant on-screen menus and prompts make this title challenging to play without good knowledge of Japanese (or a reliable guide). It is an interesting departure for the series and a good game overall, but I would have difficulty recommending it to players who might struggle with the language barrier. – JBr





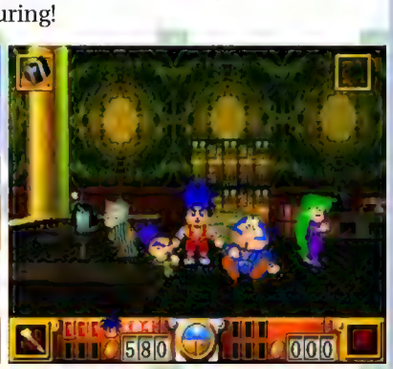


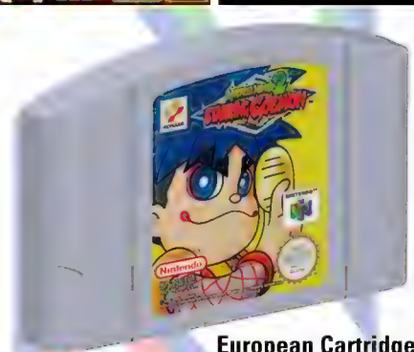
Goemon's Great Adventure

Mystical Ninja 2 Starring Goemon (EU)
Ganbare Goemon: Derodero Dōchū Obake Tenko Mori (JP)
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

Wiseman's dream becomes a nightmare when the evil nun Bismaru swipes his ghost-summoning invention. One or two players take control of Goemon and his friends as they race across feudal Japan and fantastic dimensions to stop her, battling through a myriad of conjured undead forces. Gameplay is a 2.5D platformer of fully polygonal characters with side-scrolling action. This setup is used for both beautiful backgrounds and to diversify the level design, as many zones feature multiple progression routes. Players traverse a series of stages in each area before taking on the area's castle. The castle opens once the player has collected enough Passes earned by completing stages or accomplishing missions for villagers in towns. Missions frequently challenge players to discover items, race opponents, or hunt enemies within a time limit. Interdimensional tea rooms allow players to switch their current characters. These locales are critical, as various paths through each stage are designed to cater to individual characters' abilities, including underwater segments for Yae's mermaid form and hard-to-reach platforms for Goemon's double jump. Additionally, a day-night cycle factors into numerous gameplay elements, including the variety of enemies, the townspeople's dialog, and more. The stages are replete with top-tier tunes that may energize players through all the action. At the end of each castle, a boss fight awaits. These encounters employ unique attack patterns; winning them involves learning their variations and identifying how to damage them. After each castle boss, a first-person robot battle segment follows, featuring Impact and Miss Impact teaming up to take down a giant foe. Using button combinations to employ punches, kicks, and lasers, the player must knock out the enemy robot before depleting their reserves. Switching between Impact and Miss Impact by passing the baton with the R button is valuable for evading particularly nasty attacks. After saving the day, tenacious players determined to keep playing and find all 44 Passes unlock purchasable alternate character costumes and the ability (via secret code) to have a third and fourth player join in for four-player simultaneous adventuring!

Reflections: As the last Goemon title to receive a North American release, I was disappointed it pared down some of the Japanese edition's audiovisual revelry, including the intro cutscene and vocal tracks that were such a fun part of *Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon*. Thankfully, *Goemon's Great Adventure*'s overall experience is still great. The noticeable difficulty spike from the prior entry does mean most players will witness one of gaming's more unconventional Game Over screens. To avoid seeing it too much, practice the timing for swinging off bars, use Goemon's double jump liberally, and bring a friend along for help whenever possible! – DG



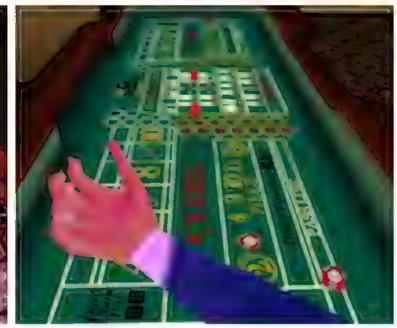


European Cartridge
Mystical Ninja 2 Starring Goemon

Japanese Cartridge
Ganbare Goemon: Derodero Dōchū Obake Tenko Mori

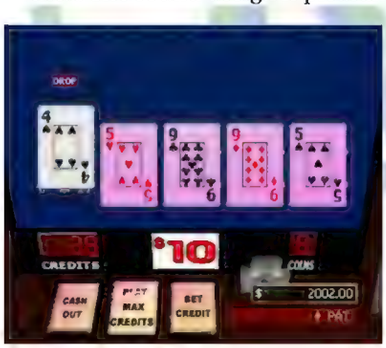
Golden Nugget 64

Genre: Gambling
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: NA
Developer: Westwood Pacific
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



Welcome to the Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino! Register with the hotel clerk and gamble at your leisure! Players start with $1000 in this 3D affair, with games chosen from a revolving menu. Cash can be gained or lost in 10 games that may be exited for another at any time. Six themed slot machines are available, such as "Wheels of Fire!", "Miner 49er!", and "Motherlode." Stakes may be altered as desired if dropping in more valuable coins sounds good before spinning the reel (this option is available for all 10 games). Video poker is another single-player game, where making the best hand in a five-card draw is the goal. Hitting the table games is a far more interactive and engaging experience, especially since there are vocal dealers and up to four players (CPU or human) who can play along at any time and also risk cash in "Sin City." The mini-baccarat card game, Big Six wheel, and roulette rely more on luck, but roulette is the highlight of the three, as betting on which slot number the ball will drop into on the spinning wheel is a bit more fun. For a more strategic game, blackjack is available, where a total card value closest to 21 without going over and beating the dealer wins. Three poker games can test the player's ability to make a hand better than their opponents, in the form of five-card draw, seven-card stud, and Texas hold 'em. These are adequate representations. However, the computer AI and "limit" bets/raises in these poker games are disappointing, and differentiating between the spades and clubs suit can be a little rough on the eyes. Finally, players can shake and throw dice for some craps action, where pass line bets, odds bets, proposition bets, and more are available. Placing bets on tables from a 3D perspective is smooth and largely works well. The rules and controls for each game are easily accessible, and there is a "sit out" option to take a breather and watch the computer play. Pesky bet limits and correcting bet denominations can dampen the mood, but the same issues exist in reality. Caveats aside, games are authentic. As bonuses not available in real life, stats can be tracked for each game, and another $1000 can be added to the bankroll with but a click. The sound design is pleasant, with all the noises of machines and murmurings of people one would hear in a casino. An appropriately cheesy lounge piano background track is a nice touch, and the chatty craps dealer who encourages unorthodox bets ("Bet the horn!") is delightful. While it is not the deepest, those looking to get their gambling fix could do much worse than this somewhat golden outing.

Reflections: While both the NES and the Super NES each had several gambling/casino games available in North America, *Golden Nugget 64* was the only N64 release. An available slideshow option is bizarre unless one desires to see images of an empty Golden Nugget dining room and a gaudy hotel room. The real Golden Nugget is not located on the famous Las Vegas Strip but on Fremont Street, surrounded by other old-school casinos (known as "Old Vegas"). One of those casinos is Binions, where I may have once somehow won $300 by playing $2 craps. – PC



GoldenEye 007

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Aug. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Take control of Special Agent James Bond (codename 007) and exercise the license to kill by shooting, sneaking, and karate-chopping through a host of enemy soldiers or up to three friends in an enthralling single-player campaign and unforgettable multiplayer mode. The arsenal for these first-person missions can be picked up from fallen enemies or found in multiplayer maps. They consist of a plethora of NATO, Russian, and science fiction firearms, throwing knives, heavy ordnance/explosives, and lasers (some of which can be dual-wielded for greater destruction). For the single-player experience, 007 also uses a variety of handy mission-specific gadgets, including a watch laser, plastic explosive, and bomb defuser. These weapons and gadgets are wonderfully handled thanks to intuitive controls and a stellar user interface. Running and gunning with two KF7 Soviet rifles or a grenade launcher helps when rushing through corridors of enemies quickly. At the same time, long-range shooting and stealth can be more easily achieved by leaning around corners with Bond's signature PP7 handgun or using the shoulder buttons to sacrifice movement for a handy red precision crosshair. Whichever method 007 chooses to use the varied munitions, players must watch his orange health and blue armor bars that pop up when hit, as even Bond is not invincible. Eight different control schemes are available. Mastering any of them may result in immense satisfaction through greater access to advanced tactics, like detonating Remote Mines mid-air or using cover to avoid incoming fire. The single-player campaign comprises 20 missions, most adapted from key points in the film (along with several nods to previous entries in the franchise), ranging from former Soviet bases to an ancient pyramid. There are three difficulties to choose from, with each setting adding additional objectives and beefier, more agile enemies. For example, playing the first mission on Agent (easy) requires Bond to only bungee jump from a dam to finish, but successive difficulties Secret Agent and 00 Agent also require disabling alarms, placing a modem, and intercepting enemy intelligence to succeed.

If other agents want to get in on the action, then the robust multiplayer mode allows up to four players to use the same weapons to duke it out as a variety of franchise characters such as Oddjob and Jaws. There are eight modes in all: Normal and Team Deathmatch, You Only Live Twice (every player has two lives), The Living Daylights flag tag, The Man With the Golden Gun (the player who finds the elusive Golden Gun can kill opponents in one hit), and Licensed to Kill (every shot is a one-hit kill). Multiplayer can be more addicting than the campaign thanks to well-designed, labyrinthine maps that encourage memorization, the same offerings of run-and-gun or precision gunplay that encourage equal parts strategy and bravado, a huge variety of choosable characters from across the 007 franchise. In any mode, an outstanding soundtrack manages to complement each level perfectly. Both the campaign and multiplayer modes offer a variety of cheat modes earned by completing specific single-player missions within time limits, like infinite ammo or paintball mode. Whichever way players embark on their secret mission, every second spent in Bond's world will be fun, frantic, and full of over-the-top action.

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

Australian Cartridge

Reflections: *GoldenEye 007*'s enduring popularity as a staple of the first-person shooter genre, especially concerning console entries, is well-earned. Including two ways to fire weapons, a variety of multiplayer modes that allow for a wide array of tactics and mayhem, and Rare's signature attention to detail ensure a refined quality every time it starts up. While discussing attention to detail, it would be a grave injustice not to mention Grant Kirkhope's legendary soundtrack, as his mix of classic Bond instrumentals and an industrial audio aesthetic work in tandem to make it feel as if you are moving through crumbling Soviet hallways and ancient temples with equal parts tenacity and panache. *GoldenEye*'s impressive features are further heightened by the Rare team adding multiplayer as a near afterthought (to the point that Rare management and Nintendo were unaware of it). Making the Herculean look effortless is all in a day's work for any good secret agent or game developer. – CP

GT 64: Championship Edition

City Tour GrandPrix: Zen Nihon GT Senshuken (JP)
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Dev.: Imagineer, Media Design & Art
Publisher: Ocean Software (NA, PAL), Imagineer (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

Jump behind the wheel of a fully licensed car from one of 14 official racing teams from the 1997 All-Japan GT Championship. The view of the action is from a third-person perspective by default, but there's an option to see it directly from the driver's seat for added realism. The sensitivity of the Control Stick takes some time to get used to, as the steering is fairly loose. Oversteer even a little, and the car will quickly be staring at the front bumpers of competitors flying by. Instead, sharp turns can be handled by riding the brakes as often as possible and keeping cool while adapting to the experience. Three locations are available to race across (Europe, Japan, and the USA), with short and long variations adding new paths to stretch out the laps. Championship Mode lets the player compete in a six-race tour against seven other drivers; the top five will earn standings points after each race, and the driver with the most points at the end is the winner. Before races, the player can adjust car features, from tire hardness to gear ratios. Modifying car setups is interesting, but repeatedly testing changes on the road can become tedious. Qualifying is rarely challenging, even when cranking up the difficulty for maximally aggressive AI drivers. Car performance will deteriorate over time, so choosing when to take pit stops is critical, especially for 24-lap races. Time Trial mode lets players challenge course times in three-lap or infinite-lap variations. Battle mode is a one-on-one race around the same tracks against a human or CPU opponent with options for head starts and catch-up assistance. The scenery is dull and uninspired despite touches like occasional rain. While racing, there's no music – just the racket of engines roaring and tires screeching. The races have some decent action, and tooling around with car setups can be fun. Unfortunately, the variety of tracks is unforgivably low, and once players have mastered the controls and courses, there's little reason to come back for seconds. Players who crave authenticity above a fun factor in their GT racing experience should give this licensed car simulator a shot, but others may want to find the off-ramp.

Reflections: The absence of anything resembling in-game music in *GT 64* further sours an already lukewarm experience. After all, some of gaming's most memorable soundtracks come from the racing genre. Often the right tunes can make close races feel all the more intense and tight victories all the more satisfying. You'll not have that here. Clearly, the development team was laser-focused on authenticity, and perhaps that's the reason for the musical exclusion. Ultimately, besides the pedals, you'll not have something to tap your foot to as you enter the final turn, and the game is worse off for it. – KS

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
City Tour GrandPrix: Zen Nihon GT Senshuken

Hamster Monogatari 64

[Hamster Story 64]
Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Apr. 2001
Region: JP
Developer: Culture Brain
Publisher: Culture Brain
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

All of the tenderness, but no pine shavings smell! Players take the role of a kind-hearted kid with the gift of understanding hamster speech in this 2D virtual pet simulator. After entering their name, the player is gifted their first hamster to raise. Once alone with the pet, it asks to be named, and the boy discovers he has the gift to understand them. The virtual experience in colorful cartoon graphics is primarily menu-driven – play consists of choosing how to care for hamsters and using funds to supply them with food, snacks, and accessories. Each day, the player selects tasks to work on, such as tending to their hamsters, shopping, reviewing the event calendar, or browsing the Hamsternet for breeder tips. Contests, including races and talent shows, provide cash prizes if the player's hamster finishes in the top three. Hamsters' statistics (stamina, speed, charm, etc.) can be raised through training and upkeep. These stats play a big part in determining how well hamsters fare in competitions. As a hamster levels up, it eventually transforms. There are dozens of forms to be discovered through collection and evolution. Players can purchase additional male or female hamsters of various colors and raise up to four at once. However, the more hamsters owned, the more boxes to clean and mouths to feed, meaning time and money spent on maintenance. Cage upgrades include water bottles, food bowls, furniture, and toys. Over time, wear and tear cause upgrades to break, so saving enough money to ensure hamsters stay fed and hydrated is critical. Humorous character dialog and charming hamster artwork keep the presentation light, though the conversations can run long and do not add much to the experience. With little variety to the gameplay, the monotony of daily box cleanings and item replacements quickly sets in. Still, pet-sim enthusiasts may see past the limited gameplay and enjoy the charm the little hamsters exude in every cutscene.

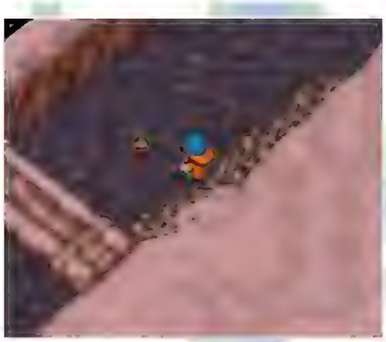
Reflections: Between 2000 and 2004, Culture Brain released a whopping eight titles in the Hamster Monogatari series (the original was *Ferret Monogatari* on Game Boy Color), varying so little that their frequency borders on the absurd. Of course, the similarity of the Hamster Monogatari series' fluffy pets to Ritsuko Kawai's famous "Hamtaro" character makes one suspicious that this series did little more than ride the wave of cute animal properties in the late '90s and early '00s. On its own merits, if you only trust yourself to raise a virtual hamster and not the real thing, this late entry for the N64 offers adorable dependents aplenty. – DG

Harvest Moon 64

Bokujū Monogatari 2 (JP)
Genre: RPG, Simulation
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Toy Box
Publisher: Natsume (NA), Victor Interactive Software (JP)
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save (JP), Game Pak Save (JP, NA)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

After losing their grandfather, the player is left with his run-down farm to make their own in this isometric sequel to the SNES farm simulation, Harvest Moon. Spend each in-game day (approximately three real-time minutes) dividing the precious hours between caring for crops, interacting with NPCs, and exploring. The Control Stick provides awkward movement in a grid-like environment that requires accuracy for carrying out actions in specific spots, most notably when tending to crops. Many tools assist with tasks, such as the hoe, which makes land plantable, or the ax, which chops down trees and stumps. This use eventually upgrades them, reducing the time and energy needed for each action towards growing and selling/gifting crops or tending to the animals available to raise and breed for their end product (eggs, milk, and wool). Periodic displays of exhaustion convey stamina, which must be managed by limiting activities or consuming harvested or foraged plants, especially the Power Berry, which permanently increases the maximum amount. Complete stamina depletion makes the player sick and wastes the entire next day. Outside the farm are several locations, including Flower Bud Village, where most other characters live and work. The main interaction focus is wooing the eligible women by gifting them according to their tastes, like Elli, who loves eggs from the player's chickens. This relationship can lead to marriage and, eventually, a child. There are also bachelors to befriend, nudging them with gifts towards having a family of their own. A person's affection level changes how they speak to the player or how a cutscene unfolds. This cycle of farming, gift-giving, and exploring ends after a little after two years when the player's father arrives for a life evaluation. Various endings are available based on improvements to the farm, the money gained, if the player is married and has a child, and how many friends they have. After the ending, the player can choose to continue their farm for fun. The graphics are cute and fitting, utilizing a variety of colors without becoming glaring against the natural locations. The bulbous sprites are smoothly animated and provide enough expression to convey emotions. With so many possibilities over how the adventure progresses and how successful the farm can be, players will invest countless actual hours into this simulation's changing of the seasons.

Reflections: Harvest Moon is a popular series to this day, and its modern sequels are currently released as Story of Seasons (due to regional publishing rights). *Harvest Moon 64* is a maximal time management experience with no way to complete everything available daily. Hard choices must be made! There are a few unappealing aspects, such as jarring crowd cheers at the races and stressful fishing mechanics. Still, there's something intensely gratifying about seeing tangible results from my actions. It's not just a farm and family I'm working to establish; I can also watch someone else's romance develop. I haven't cared this much about two imaginary people's relationship since I watched *Days of Our Lives*. – KY



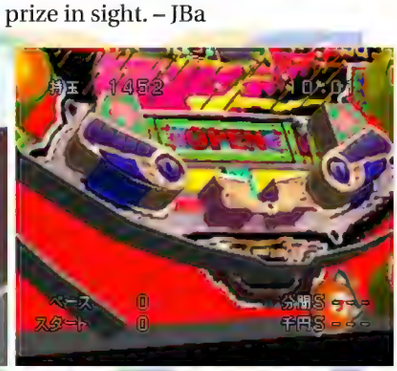
Japanese Cartridge
Bokujū Monogatari 2

Heiwa Pachinko World 64

Genre: Pachinko, Gambling
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Shouei System
Publisher: Amtex
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆

Stroll through gambling parlors and watch metal balls clatter across pegs in this entry-level Heiwa-branded pachinko game. Two starting modes are available: Beginner, which doubles the chance of a jackpot across four types of machines, and Normal, which allows a player to rack up wins with standard odds. A player can wander through a chosen parlor in a first-person view, search for an unoccupied machine, and then take a seat to begin playing this upright pinball machine without flippers. Players fire a series of pellet-like balls at varying strengths, hitting targets and trying to land as many as possible in a special catch near the bottom. Balls may be purchased through the on-screen menu or via kiosks, then the wheel to release them can be controlled by rotating the Control Stick. The more it is rotated, the faster the balls fire. Balls can be viewed falling through the maze of pegs and bumpers by using the C-buttons to tilt the 3D board, the D-pad to pan, and the L/R triggers to zoom in/out. Players cannot view the entire playfield at once, but keeping good track of the action is doable with fast fingers. When a ball lands in the winning catch, slot wheels spin at the center of the board, rewarding the player with a short animation and cash prizes. The visual styling, animations, and winnings vary depending on the machine's theme and location, though they are always something bright, colorful, and cheery. The pachinko play is emulated decently, but everything surrounding the actual play is awkward. Wandering through parlors is pointless, as there is little to do but buy cards from kiosks, which can be done while seated at a machine, and stare at faceless, unmoving patrons. The walking controls are also stiff and imprecise, turning every stroll into an exercise in tedium. Prizes are missing, too, so the only reward players get for playing is enough cash to buy more balls. While there is some passable pachinko action here, wading through too many dull distractions and outright flaws may not be worth the time.

Reflections: *Heiwa Pachinko World 64* is the fourth game in a series. The previous three titles were released on the Super Famicom and utilized detailed sprites and digitized photos for parlors and pachinko machines. The ability to walk through those parlors sounds like an upgrade, but the sparse visuals and unintuitive controls made me shudder every time I got up from a machine. There was a huge missed opportunity to create a true pachinko "world" feeling with this title, as it would be great to explore parlors to find different prizes and machines. Instead, what we got were zombie patrons, yawn-inducing kiosks, and not a prize in sight. – JBa

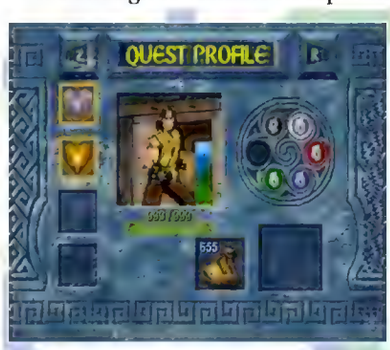


Hercules: The Legendary Journeys

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Player 1
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

In mythical times, Hercules must save the world from the war god Ares. This third-person outing has brawling, adventuring, conversational dialogue, and many other elements from the television show. The adventure begins with a tutorial covering jumping, climbing, and fighting. Hercules can punch, kick backward, throw stunned enemies, and use health for a spinning clothesline. Magic potions damage nearby enemies, but they're most helpful in pushing them away when swarmed, a common predicament since kicking is hard to aim and the camera is confusing. To progress, travel between towns, fight ruffians, and help people with tasks. Every quest involves excessive amounts of backtracking. For example, to cross snowy Alpsius, the player needs coats, which are earned by bringing leathers to a tailor (twice), then must return to Alpsius multiple times to deliver items to Hephaestus. Bandits can quickly floor Hercules (a demigod), and waiting to get back up is tedious. It doesn't take long to expend an entire life bar and get a game over. Enemies are limited to generic thugs, canines, and archer fauns. Most bosses are recycled, including three minotaurs, each hiding in his own labyrinth with puzzles and basic traps like spikes. Baddies drop dinar coins, which buy potions and required items but vanish quickly, and enemies can interrupt their collection. Treasure chests also yield dinars or items like keys, while barrels hold healing items. Hercules' friends help, too; sometimes, Hercules' sidekick Iolaus opens new areas, and the Golden Hind Serena appears for occasional archery sequences. Sadly, her third-person aiming controls are aggravating and demand precise stick movement. The first-person aiming option is better, yet is disabled during her boss battle, which requires the player to hit targets while dodging attacks. On top of this, the setting is generic (grass, snow, seaside, etc.), and the visuals are lackluster. What should be a legendary journey is all just frustrating – to quote Iolaus: "Wow. That sucks."

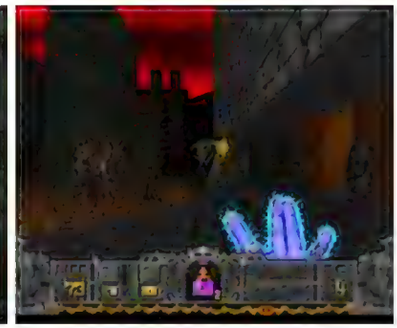
Reflections: I grew up without cable television, so I watched a lot of '90s syndicated programs, including *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*. While this title isn't the most potent example on the console, some people remember it fondly, thanks to the show. I am not one of them, but I understand. Hercules and his friends look right, the tone generally matches the show, and some of the adventure is tolerable. Unfortunately, several punishing events push it over the line, such as Serena's battle with Mnemosyne (who looks nothing as she did on TV). This boss is cruel, not challenging, and it's enough to validate its reputation. – KN



European Cartridge

Hexen

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: May 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Raven Software
Ported by: Software Creations
Pub.: GT Interactive Software (NA, PAL), GameBank (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



Korax, second of the Serpent Riders, has corrupted the leaders of the human world. In this follow-up to 1994's *Heretic* on the PC, up to four players become champions tasked with traveling through the portals that tether their world to Korax's to find and destroy his forces. This first-person 3D shooter, set in a medieval fantasy world, borrows from the adventure and dungeon-crawler genres to deepen its level design and progression while holding to the fast-paced FPS formula. Players choose from three unique classes: fighter, cleric, and mage. Each has a suite of weapons to find that complement their style and benefit more or less from different armors found in the world. For example, the fighter can wield weapons like Timon's Axe or Hammer of Retribution, the cleric can use the Serpent Staff or Firestorm spell, and the mage can employ the Sapphire Wand or Arc of Death. Two mana reserves (green and blue) function as advanced weapon ammo, with the player consuming one (or both). An inventory of discoverable power-ups ranges from simple potions to the power of flight. Five difficulty settings help tweak the challenge the enemies pose, but the greatest challenge comes from trying to discern where to go next. There are two control schemes available: Control Stick method and Control Pad method. The Control Pad method is recommended to emulate more traditional FPS controls, including the ability to "circle strafe," a valuable method to both avoid and engage enemies simultaneously. The stage structure features a hub-and-spoke design. Each of its five hubs includes a central area and themed sub-areas that the players must visit and revisit as switches and items found in one can unlock unexplored locations in another. With its tight first-person perspective, dying from platforming perils and room-sized traps can seem cruel, but death is not so punitive as to discourage exploration. An additional Deathmatch mode allows players to square off, with or without monsters, on 30 maps. Other nice visual and level design touches are found throughout, such as using dynamic verticality to simulate crumbling bridges and rising lava. There are also beautiful weapon effects, particularly the mage's spells. Players willing to endure the steep difficulty curve, labyrinthine layouts, and monstrous foes will find plenty to enjoy in Korax's realm.

Reflections: *Hexen* pushes *Doom*'s "id Tech 1" engine to greater heights, engaging the player not only with enemies but with Action Code Script that powers randomization (such as ambient sounds or varying up switch orders,) cross-map variables, environmental hazards, and merciless traps. This admirable PC port sacrifices FMV sequences but little else. Cooperative play is a welcome feature but can bog down the frame rate. Block-happy Centaurs can be frustrating to endure, but the game's true difficulty comes from figuring out where to go and what to do – a challenge even with the help of a walkthrough and a nightmare to tackle without! – DG

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

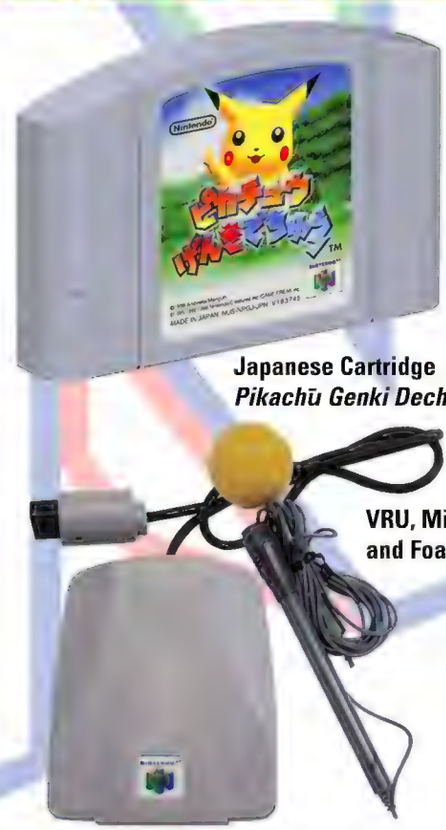
European Cartridge with Age Rating

Hey You, Pikachu!

Pikachū Genki Dechū (JP)
Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Ambrella
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, VRU (required)
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆

Professor Oak has developed a communication device called the PokéHelper and needs someone to test it. Fortunately, a cute little Pikachu is running around, looking for a friend. In this 3D, first-person simulation in a bright cartoon world, each morning starts at home, where Pikachu meets the player for the day's activities. These diversions include finding ingredients for Bulbasaur's stew, fishing for water-type Pokémon, and hitting a piñata on the beach for a surprise trip with Lapras. Pikachu is the one that carries out all these actions while the player moves around with the Control Stick and shouts commands. A head symbol in the lower right will appear to indicate that Pikachu can take direction. Holding the Z button while speaking into the VRU (Voice Recognition Unit) microphone will tell them what to do. Although Pikachu has their electric abilities, there are no battles. Instead, the player can command them to use those abilities to knock items off a tree or open a treasure chest. As long as their mood meter in the lower left is high enough, they follow commands they hear, assuming they understand them. Sometimes, Pikachu is busy with their own distractions and may need a quick shout for their attention. If they are actively listening, a banner with their name appears on the sides of the screen. Pikachu wants to go to specific locations for the first few days, each with a set activity. Satisfactorily completing them can open new activities at that locale, unlock new areas, and earn points for purchasing items. Eventually, the freedom to take Pikachu to different places and activities opens up. After 365 days of adventure, it is time to bid them farewell (although they do return after a round of goodbyes for those wishing to continue). The music is cheery and upbeat, and the excellent Pokémon sounds use the voice actors from the animated series. Designed without the complexities and strategy of the main RPG series, the experience of playing with Pikachu is the highlight of this effort to entertain younger fans of the franchise. For some, the gameplay may be too simple, and for others, the genre may be too different, but for someone with an open mind (or a child to entertain), this is just right.

Reflections: I love a chill gaming experience, and this does well in that manner without being a dull affair, as some children's games can be. Unfortunately, *Hey You, Pikachu!* has not been released on other consoles (at the time of this writing), and there aren't any sequels. There was later genre experimentation with *Pokémon Channel* on the GameCube and *PokéPark Wii* on, well, the Wii. I consider this an enjoyable, charming game, but since it's the only N64 game that requires the VRU, it may not be worth the effort to play for most. – KY



Japanese Cartridge
Pikachū Genki Dechū

VRU, Microphone, and Foam Windscreen

Hot Wheels Turbo Racing

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Stormfront Studios
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

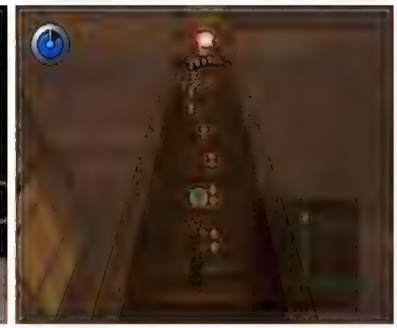
Choose from 40 Hot Wheels cars to drive in this stunt-centric 3D racing title based on the iconic Mattel toy line. Six intricate race tracks are available at the onset, with more tracks and cars to unlock through play. Players in third- or first-person perspective can test vehicles on various terrains such as deserts, mountains, and snow, all while searching for alternate pathways to exploit and cut ahead of the competition. Both Practice and Exhibition modes offer ways to race and explore tracks, usually with the aid of speed, durability, and handling-boosting power-ups found on them. Players can also compete in the prestigious Hot Wheels Cup to unlock tracks and earn respect. Each car has distinctive attributes – Top Speed, Stunts, Durability, and Control – making each better suited for certain tracks or driving styles. Selecting a car known for raw speed, such as the Dragster, can result in zipping past the competition. Choosing the Go-Kart can allow for easier mid-air handling and controlled landings to pull off the most impressive stunts, while the Super Van can plow through cars that stand in the way. Controls are smooth regardless of the vehicle or mode, and there is always the option to perform mid-air tricks and stunts. Once airborne, complete rolls, flips, and spins are performed using the Control Stick, and slamming on the emergency brake while flying through the air can pull off an impressive barrel roll. Sticking the landing racks up crucial turbo boosts, shown on the Turbo meter at the bottom left of the screen. These techniques are also essential to scoring mega points in Airtime Challenge mode. The soundtrack features several (somewhat compressed) instrumental tracks from contemporary music artists, such as Primus and Reverend Horton Heat. The occasional graphical glitch can occur, caused by high-speed collisions that momentarily send cars out of the track. These glitches can cause confusion and frustration when suddenly reappearing on the track without a clear idea of which direction to go. Despite this minor flaw, there are enough thrills, spills, stunts, and cars to appease both racing and extreme sports fans.

Reflections: I had plenty of Hot Wheels cars as a kid, but I never had one of those cool tracks that allowed you to race against a friend and shoot through loops or blast up ramps. What's a resourceful kid with a vivid imagination to do? Create ramps out of household furniture and other toys! *Hot Wheels Turbo Racing* does an excellent job of recreating that sense of creativity I had to employ when the reality was much more uninspiring. Carpets as lava, footstools as mountains, and cars that can fly through the air for 30 full seconds were all fair game. The tracks presented help those of us with a case of childhood nostalgia recreate the gravity-defying tricks and stunts we all thought were a regular part of merely driving a car. – JBr

European Cartridge

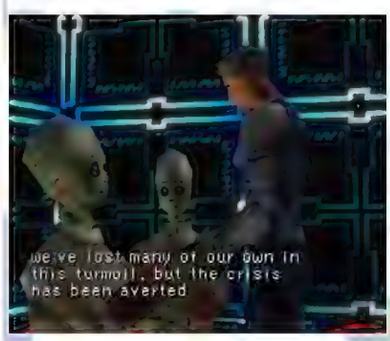
Hybrid Heaven

Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



Secret Service agent Johnny Slater is trapped in an underground alien structure and must rescue the kidnapped United States President Weller, who has been replaced with a clone from an alien species known as the Hybrids. Slater navigates the subsurface complex in a third-person perspective and engages in real-time action by blasting away at patrolling drones and probes. Platforming elements exist with gaps to leap over, ledges to climb, and doors that require discovering a keycard encoder. When encountering more daunting foes, such as the mech-like Pherkad and the tentacle-laden Castor, battles transition into a secluded area that unfolds in an RPG-like manner. While freely positioning themselves, depending upon whoever initiates contact first, the player is prompted with offensive or defensive options like launching into a melee attack or using the "technique" command to execute pro wrestling maneuvers like a Piledriver or Bodyslam. Defensively, players can "step" out of the way of an oncoming attack or "guard" against it to reduce damage. Through these one-on-one encounters, Slater earns experience and levels up his offensive and defensive capabilities after each battle. Johnny is encouraged to take punishment to toughen up and learn new moves and attacks that opponents do to him. This approach is a unique way to freshen up battles, and the vast array of opposition will require players to approach every engagement differently. What does not help is a jerky third-person camera that players will constantly be fussing with after dealing with off-camera drones and sudden demises after coming upon inadvertently obscured gaps. While this action-RPG does offer a hearty amount of content with a sprawling narrative, there are multiple instances in the middle portions with minimal plot development, which causes the pace to feel plodding and unnecessarily excessive. Most visuals have a darker tone that captures the constant sense of peril. Minus several smartly implemented vocal lines, the entirety of the dialog is text-based, with ambient industrial music adequately establishing the eerie atmosphere. It is also worth noting the VS mode for standalone two-player duels and Creature Battle, where players can work their way through the whole enemy roster. Both are interesting additions but not worth frequently revisiting. If players can tolerate and overcome the problematic camera and pacing issues, they will find a unique and gripping sci-fi thriller to sink their teeth into.

Reflections: *Hybrid Heaven* is one of the most peculiar games I have ever played with the way it molds all these different types of gameplay variants together. There are moments where the exposition can be too grandiose for its own good. Still, it is worth persevering through for a gratifying final act and an overly campy, heartfelt ending that somehow works for this extraordinary journey. Expansion Pak support adds a letterbox option and resolution enhancements at the cost of a performance slowdown. – DK



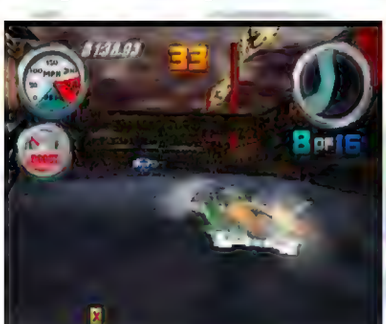
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Hydro Thunder

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Games
Ported by: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Think NASCAR and Formula One racing are dangerous pursuits? The Hydro Thunder Racing Association is here to show all of them up! This league of motor-boating enthusiasts knows no limit as the races take place in the planet's most dangerous waterways, from volcanic islands and decrepit shipyards to a post-apocalyptic trip through New York City from either a first or third-person perspective. Controls consist of the basics of steering, braking, and acceleration as players juggle topsy-turvy boats across rocky waters. Only the easiest courses are available initially, but other venues open by racing successfully, ultimately unlocking a surreal water ride that spans the globe. However, doubling the danger are the boats themselves – essentially rockets built to carve through rivers and seasides alike. Each of these 13 aquatic beasts has machine ratings: speed, steering, and flight (hangtime). Players will spend plenty of time airborne as they careen across waterfalls and explore each course's almost labyrinthine layout while hoping for shortcuts and hidden passages to help them take the lead over 15 other racers. Speed and simplicity are the primary themes based on the spectacular arcade original. Players can temporarily turbo boost, which activates the Mighty Hull, a temporary transformation that grants invincibility on top of the speed increase and better cornering ability. The boost gauge can be refilled by collecting boost icons strewn around the waterways. Thus, strategy can be reduced to a singular pursuit – opponents, obstacles, and even the checkpoint time limit may be secondary to nabbing the next boost icon before the booster's juice is fully consumed. The graphics are impressive, with unique locations containing variety in their sharp color schemes, textures, and backgrounds. A simulation this is not, but a bustling soundtrack, buttery smooth frame rate, and fun, raucous physics make this an impressive showboat of the original's manic genius and a fine showcase for the Nintendo 64.



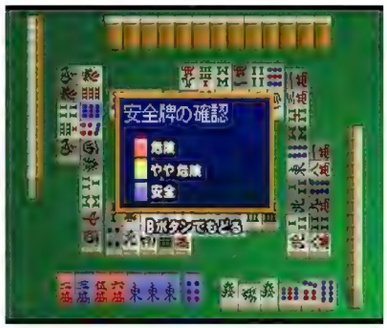
Reflections: *Hydro Thunder* harkens to an era in which straight spectacle and grand, rollercoaster-like arcade action were favored over the granular, nuts-and-bolts direction often found in modern racers. Indeed, for those fanatics still longing for a modicum of depth, a career mode exists in the PlayStation port. Four-player action, however, is exclusive to the Nintendo 64 version – provided one has an Expansion Pak and doesn't mind a sharp sacrifice in gameplay framerate speed. – DA

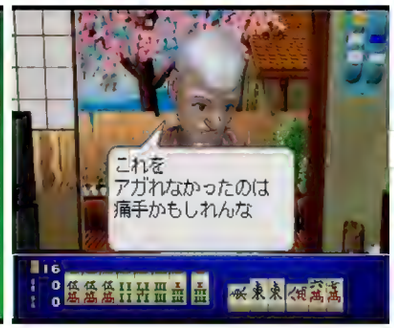
European Cartridge

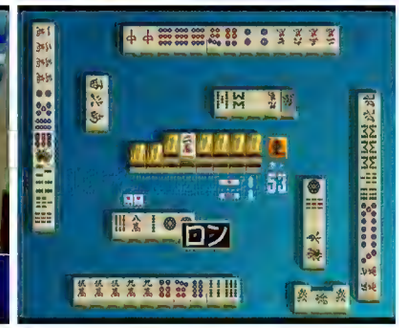
NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Ide Yosuke no Mahjong Juku

[Ide Yosuke's Mahjong School]
Genre: Tile Game
Release Date: Apr. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Rare
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

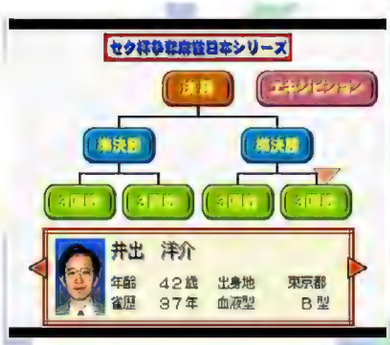






The Murakami family is holding a friendly mahjong tournament with their friends, family, and mahjong professional Ide Yosuke! Traditional riichi mahjong rules apply. Players start with 13 tiles. Each turn, a tile is drawn, and if the player cannot form a winning hand, one is discarded. Winning players earn points from one or more opponents, depending on the type of victory (a ron victory from an opponent's discard or a tsumo victory from the player's own draw phase), matching any dora (bonus tiles shared by all players, shown at the top of the screen), and yaku, the unique attributes of the winning hand. In-game prompts will alert the player to when calls are available and which tiles will be part of the action. Two distinct modes are featured, Family and Scorecard, both with top-down perspectives. Family features casual or tournament play. Here, the view can be toggled between the family and the table. Other players will occasionally chime in with their thoughts and insights, giving them personality and life but otherwise not affecting gameplay. The Murakami family starts unlocked while their friends are unlocked through play. The 3D models of the characters for Family Mode are charmingly rendered, and the music is as cheery as the players. Three Family save files track players' progress and their bronze, silver, and gold finishes in tournaments. Scorecard mode lets the player review the text-narrated games of the 1997 Mahjong Japan Series, move by move, seeing experienced players play with an analysis by Ide Yosuke that explains what's happening and why. The player can even step in at any point of any game from the Series for a fun challenge. With its friendly presentation and dialog, the experience effectively disarms what can sometimes feel like a difficult traditional game to learn and master. This friendly table simulator is highly recommended for less experienced mahjong players looking for casual practice.

Reflections: Professional mahjong player Ide Yosuke is no stranger to video game mahjong, with his name attached to games for decades – as far back as 1987's *Ide Yosuke Meijin no Jissen Mahjong* for the Famicom. While the custom controller that the game came with isn't found in this version, being able to use the N64 controller to look between the table and the thoughtful expressions and behavior of family around the table evokes the same lighthearted feeling as the iconic smiling, bespectacled face of the game's namesake. Just be sure to bring a printed-out sheet of winning tile combinations. While the game will provide hints of smarter discarding and tiles to watch for, it will not coach you into legal scoring hands. – DG



Iggy's Reckin' Balls

Iggy-kun no Bura Bura Poyon (JP)
Genre: Racing, Action
Release Date: Aug. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Iggy and his spherical friends are up for a reckin' good time in this vertical-action 2.5D racing game set in a static-angled third-person view. Race is the main mode, which pits four players against each other as they climb, swing, and dash to victory. There are eight selectable characters from the start (nine unlockable ones), each with their own speed and grappling abilities, like Narlie the jack-o'-lantern who pulls himself up quickly onto platforms he grabs. The controls are smooth and responsive, leaving players with nothing to worry about but a sense of urgency through the fast-paced action. The "Towers" levels are divided among 11 themed worlds, many of which unlock through advancement, from the cake mountains of Candy Lane to the circuit board tracks of Tektricity. Progress is saved only after the completion of each world's 10 Towers. Each level consists of multiple suspended slim track segments traversed with the help of springs, teleporters, and fists, which players shoot out to grab a platform (or a nearby racer for a short stun and quick advantage). In each racer's way are hazards such as moving platforms, sticky goo, and the four creatures (Stompie, Pushie, Spikie, and Stickie), whose names indicate their danger. In addition, many Towers have yellow stars that can be picked up for a random ability that either gives the racer an advantage (for example, transporting them to a further point of the level) or puts the opponents at a disadvantage (like reducing them in size for a short duration). Once a racer has reached the checkered area of the Tower, they are teleported to the beginning until they have completed the required number of laps. The music tracks are generic electronic tunes, although this is broken up by the enemy and the character's short interjections when interacting. While the single-player experience can become repetitive through race after race of similar visuals, the fun lies in playing with friends, especially in Battle mode, where players face each other to survive the longest through whatever grabbing and attacks they throw at each other. There is also Game Mix-Up mode, which allows players to create a championship using a set of any 10 Towers unlocked through Race. The unlockable characters and tracks add replay value for the solo experience of this high-action racer, but the most memorable experiences come from reckin' the Towers with friends.

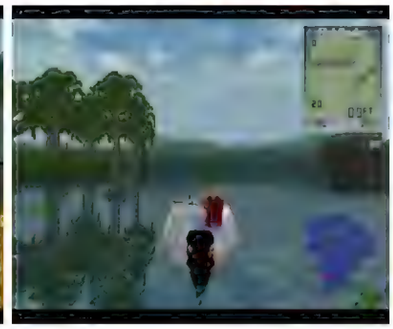
Reflections: I enjoyed *Iggy's Reckin' Balls* for offering a different experience to the racing genre. Including the ideas of platforming and vertically traveling makes it feel fresh. Plus, seeing your character grab another one and swing them around 180 degrees is about as satisfying as any Mario Kart blue shell I've ever launched. If you're looking to up the cuteness factor, might I suggest playing the Japanese version, *Iggy-kun no Bura Bura Poyon*, which replaces all characters in the menus with kawaii versions? Extreme, hardcore Iggy, or cute, chibi Iggy-kun? There's a version for everyone! – KY

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Iggy-kun no Bura Bura Poyon

In-Fisherman Bass Hunter 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: July 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: GearHead Entertainment
Publisher: Take-Two Interactive Software
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆



Join Al Linder for a day on the lake in this fishing outing that goes all-in on authenticity. Command an angler from a third-person perspective, whether fighting a trophy-worthy bass or piloting a Ranger boat searching for the next primo spot to cast a line. There are two locations to explore: the real-life Lake Arthur in Pennsylvania and Butler Chain Lakes in Florida. Each site features three potential fishing spots requiring different equipment based on terrain, weather, and what the player aims to reel in. Official licenses are on nearly everything, from lures to bait to the Garmin used to locate the next prize. Once a spot is chosen and the player is outfitted to their liking, it's time to fish. Take the tackle seriously, as lures, lines, and bait will significantly impact whether or not those satisfying nibbles occur. Casting is simple enough – set the power with the analog stick, then hit the A button to let it fly. Once the line is cast, the screen splits into two views: one atop the angler and boat and the other underwater, focused on the fish. Once a fish takes a nibble, reel quickly with the A button or slowly with B, pulling back on the analog stick to move it towards the boat and adjusting drag with C-up and C-down (added drag more effectively reels fish in but can break the line). Initially, players may wear out the analog stick in desperate attempts to will a bass a tenth of a foot closer to their boat. With patience, practice, and a refined technique, making catches will start to happen a little more frequently. The Fish for Fun mode is an excellent place to practice before jumping into Championship, where constant reminders tell the player that there are only so many hours in the day to catch a winner. The challenge is more about choosing the right gear and planning the best time and place to fish than just going to the lake and catching a big one. So much patience is required that the reward of nabbing a bass just doesn't feel like a proper payoff. It's also a huge letdown when a long-sought-after fish gets away, and even when the player has mastered the reeling controls, more fish will escape than end up in the boat. For those accustomed to the waiting of real-world fishing who do not mind spending time preparing gear, exploring lakes, and lamenting lost catches, some fun can lurk just under the surface.

Reflections: *Bass Hunter 64* invests in creating an authentic fishing experience but isn't afraid to provide an opportunity or two to get weird. There are a number of cheats that can be entered via an in-game menu that aid you while playing, like eliminating tournament penalties or unlocking all lures, or serve as a reminder that you're playing a video game, like pursuing fish that share your angler's face or turning your boat into a bathtub. There's nothing like playing an authentic fishing game while your fisherman has a huge head, unbreakable string, and infinite cash. Take my word for it and unlock the bathtub early. – KS

European Cartridge

Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Dec. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: LucasArts
Ported by: Factor 5
Publisher: LucasArts
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

The Cold War has begun, and the Soviet Union is hunting for parts of an ancient and powerful Babylonian machine. Take control of Indiana Jones in this fully 3D third-person adventure and race to recover the pieces first while unraveling the mystery of the "Infernal Machine." There are 17 expansive stages to explore that vary between tombs, ruins, mountains, islands, and deserts across the globe. Indiana sets out with a revolver with unlimited ammo, a lighter for torches and candles, and his iconic bullwhip. Stages are filled with puzzles to solve, traps, treasures to collect, secrets to uncover, and threats to combat (or, in some cases, avoid). Indy can run, jump, swim, climb through the stages, and even traverse some in a jeep, raft, or mine cart. He can also push and pull blocks and statues to create new paths and use his trusty whip to swing across longer gaps or pull himself higher up whenever there is something to latch on to. Keys, medicine, and anti-venom kits can be picked up to help along the way. In between stages, Indy can purchase health items, grenades, and ammunition for additional firearms (including pistol, rifle, shotgun, machine gun, and even rocket launcher). Recovered Infernal Machine parts can come in handy, too, allowing Indy to turn invisible, levitate, generate electricity, or blow up walls. Indy generally handles well enough, but the controls can feel clunky when more precise jumps and movements are demanded. Combat, unfortunately, is forgettable. Nearly all encounters, save for a few otherworldly exceptions, consist of gunfights with mindless Soviet soldiers or picking off smaller foes like spiders, scorpions, or snakes. Indy can throw punches and attack with the whip, but there is never a good reason to when Indy has an expanding arsenal of firearms at his disposal. Stages can be long, resulting in long stretches of near-silence when figuring out the way forward. Full voice acting, some impressive graphics, and a cinematic soundtrack work wonders for a story that gradually builds suspense and intrigue, helping proceedings feel like a proper Indiana Jones adventure, even if the final product is rough around the edges.

Reflections: *The Infernal Machine* does come with long stretches of quiet. However, that quiet does come with a payoff that I grew to appreciate. Whenever you swing with the whip, survive an arduous path, or solve a difficult puzzle, a quick bit of the Indiana Jones theme usually acknowledges it, similar to when you hear the secret tune in a Legend of Zelda game whenever you unlock something. I found it compelling because hearing that iconic theme didn't just mean I was making progress; in the context of the game, it meant I was settling into the role of Indiana Jones. The game is linear in its structure, but using that music to acknowledge your success helped sell the idea that you're thinking like Indy. I think that's notable because, when executed correctly, that's something unique to the game that the movies can't do. – NT

Indy Racing 2000

Genre: Racing
Release Date: June 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Paradigm Entertainment
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

The acclaimed Indy 500 and eight additional tracks from the North American-based Indy Racing League are primed and ready for action. Take control of 20 open-wheel drivers from the 1999 season, such as Scott Goodyear, Jeff Ward, and Roberto Guerrero, in this first- or third-person racing game that offers simulation and arcade driving. Selecting Single Race or the 11-race Championship season mode will drop the player into a simulation of the Indy Racing League. Pre-race options include a two-lap qualifier and tweaking car settings for wings, gear ratio, and tire pressure, or opting for each track's default recommended vehicle settings. Options can be adjusted to make racing more accessible by selecting tighter or looser steering, race length, and turning vehicle damage on or off. Taking advantage of the presets enabled for all 20 drivers is a convenient method to jump into races and feel competitive immediately. Drafting is the key to success, with an on-screen "Draft" meter filling up when closing in on the tail of the next racer. Consistent drafting is imperative to achieve a podium finish and fend off the competition. A drawback to the core racing is the frequency of rear-ending competition at speeds well over 200 mph, sending both drivers wildly spinning off the track. For a more arcade racing atmosphere, dive into Gold Cup mode for a series of two to three race sets on shorter fantasy road tracks that eliminate pits, qualifying, and car damage. Players will rack up experience points with every race series conquered and work their way up to unlocking better-performing sets of Midget, Sprint, Formula, and Indy Cars. Two-player multiplayer is available to compete against a friend and eight other CPU drivers with horizontal- or vertical-split-screen views. The closest opponent indicator and 3D animated pit crew both impress amongst otherwise average graphics. A bland rock score and sporadic sports announcer are present yet unremarkable on the audio side. The pit chief, however, stands out with his support when successfully passing and drafting. Having two completely different racing styles to choose from may seem unexpected at first, but neither option holds the other back, resulting in fun for both arcade and sim-racing fans.

Reflections: This is a surprising change of pace from Paradigm Entertainment, fresh off their pair of sim-heavy *F-1 World Grand Prix* games. The sim-focused Indy Racing League is a much lighter sim affair and requires very little of the needed precision cornering in Paradigm's F-1 titles. Including the Gold Cup mode is a surprising but welcoming reprieve from the serious speedways to compete in an arcade racer with backdrops of waterfalls, deserts, and dense forests. Finally, make sure to invest time into the first-person cockpit camera that captures the sense of speed far greater than the other perspectives. – DK

International Superstar Soccer '98

Jikkyō World Soccer: World Cup France '98 (JP)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

Bend it like "Decham" in this brilliant but non-FIFA soccer gem. With 52 teams (plus six secret ones), take control of pseudonymously-named replicas of all those famous players in tense, tactical bird's-eye-view matches. Each is named closely to its real-world counterpart and has a similar height, appearance, and name. Players may be renamed if one wants to identify real-world counterparts correctly. Controls are simple and keep moves like tackling, passing, and shooting confined to single button presses, making it accessible to newcomers. More complex actions are available for experienced players through button inputs and moving the analog stick in tandem, such as trick dribbling to get past defenders. The gameplay's ease of accessibility allows for up to four-player action, including a mode in which players can watch the CPU play against itself. Fair warning, though: the AI can be easy and often won't respond well to basic teammate tactics, such as holding a defense when up a point. There are a handful of modes to play, including International Cup, in which a player can take a team through qualifiers to the cup itself. World League is a round-robin-style tournament with most international teams. Scenario mode allows taking control of a famous historical match-in-progress, including scenarios where a team is down several goals at halftime or facing off in a tie-breaking showdown. Open Game (single exhibition matches), Penalty Kick, and Practice are also available. The graphics are commendable. Characters have distinct facial animations and smooth and varied movements, and crowds are lively and colorful (although they do not hold up to scrutiny). The sound design is authentic, with clear stadium chants. The in-game commentary from Tony Gubba sounds a little apathetic, but he may come across as grounded, depending on taste. Unfortunately, there is a noticeable and distracting slowdown when playing with four players, but it is not game-breaking. This fantastic, gorgeous, and fun soccer outing is a straightforward recommendation, especially for those with a soccer-loving friend or family member.

Reflections: There is little room for improvement in *International Superstar Soccer '98*; the AI could be more competent, and the game lacks a license, but it is otherwise close to being an ideal soccer game. However, something similar can be said for its predecessor, as the additions to *International Superstar Soccer 64* are minor. Sequel updates to sports titles usually include a more current player roster, but you don't even get that in a game without a license. – RR

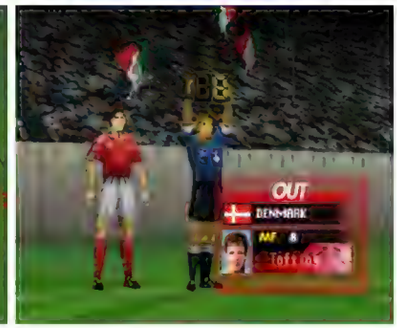
European Cartridge

Asian Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Jikkyō World Soccer: World Cup France '98

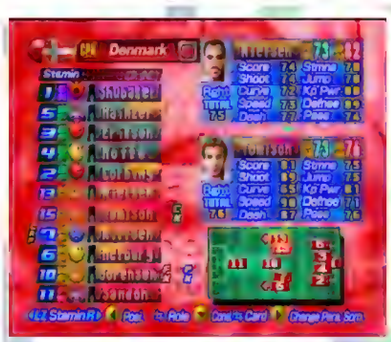
International Superstar Soccer 2000

Jikkyō J.League 1999: Perfect Striker 2 (JP)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆☆



This fast-paced soccer title is the third in the series of yearly updated releases. Matches are played from a stadium camera perspective, switching control to whichever player is closest to the ball. Simple button presses handle most major actions, so even beginners will pass and shoot in no time. Advanced techniques such as feints, short lobs, and stepovers are available via combinations of buttons or double-taps. Players can even curve the ball mid-air by holding R and pushing the Control Stick. There are a handful of modes to pick from, but most boil down to choosing a team and playing matches in different tournament setups. There's also Scenario Mode, which drops players into famous real-world situations, such as coming back from being behind two points in the second half. These scenarios are fun, though they can be extremely difficult. There is also Penalty Kick mode, in which the player acts as either a shooter or goalkeeper, and a training mode allows practicing different techniques and strategies. All modes can be enjoyed by up to four players (cooperatively or competitively), so they can approach any session with considerable variation. There are 100 playable teams, though licensing is muddled, as some players have real-world names while others use pseudonyms. The simultaneous use of authentic and fake names may appear jarring, but since players can be renamed, it's a minor nuisance. Player models look good, as do the stadiums and crowds. Inserting the Expansion Pak allows for improved visuals (though it results in a noticeable drop in frame rate). The sound is fantastic: the crowd will cheer, boo, and even start to chant as the match progresses. Two commentators play off each other and react to the action on the field, which lends a lot of life to each contest. This final N64 soccer sequel is delightful, even if it doesn't offer anything new or memorable.

Reflections: The most interesting part of *International Superstar Soccer 2000* did not show up in the North American release: Career Mode (PAL regions) and Success Mode (Japan). Career/Success Mode is a create-a-player feature where footballers can take a path to the big leagues by improving stats and dealing with real-world issues outside of matches (including bizarre things such as pornography scandals). It added an RPG-like experience to the title, and it's a shame it was left out. This exclusion makes the NA version of *ISS 2000* feel like a carbon copy of previous titles, as it struggles to differentiate itself much from the competition in the North American region. – RR

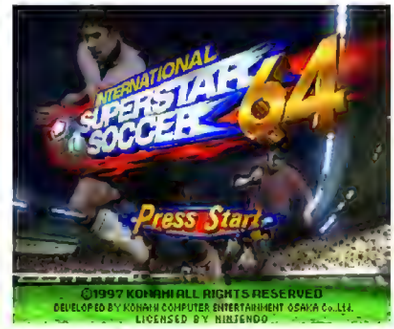


European Cartridge

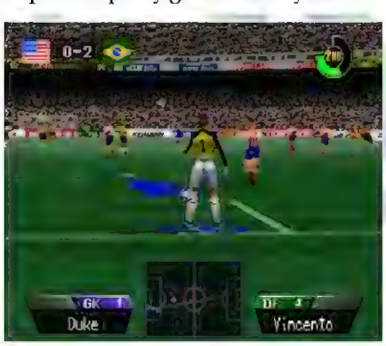
Japanese Cartridge
Jikkyō J.League 1999: Perfect Striker 2

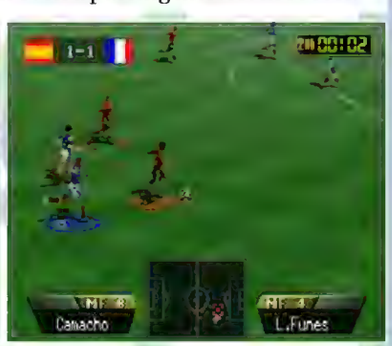
International Superstar Soccer 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆



This slick, fast-paced title adapted from Japan's *Jikkyō J.League Perfect Striker* may not boast an enormous number of teams nor the licensing of real-world names, but it goes to great lengths to provide a stellar soccer experience. Gameplay takes place from a faux-isometric stadium camera, switching between players as necessary who control the ball. Passing, dribbling, and other basic commands are simple button presses. Advanced techniques (like an offensive body feint or a defensive shoulder barge, which could result in a penalty or card) are done by holding R or the C-buttons while performing other actions. Six modes are available: World League is the meatiest, setting up a series of 70 games to take a team to the top. International Cup is a bite-sized version of World League, consisting of a short sequence of matches in a round-robin tournament. Open Game is a single exhibition match while practicing shooting and goalkeeping skills is possible in P.K. shoot-outs. Training allows a single team on a pitch to do what the player desires, though its usefulness is limited. Finally, there is the Scenarios mode, where players can attempt brutally one-sided in-progress scenarios, such as being down by three goals with only a minute left on the clock and trying to come back. Strategy is the key to winning these scenarios, echoing a gameplay emphasis on tactics instead of reflexes. Luckily, there are plenty of tactical options to exploit – getting CPU teammates to cover certain opponents, calling for teammates to rush the ball, or falling back into a defensive position – all of which can be activated in the middle of a match. Every mode can be played with any combination of up to four human or computer players (one vs. three, two on two, etc.), resulting in a flexible and fun system. On the downside, the spoken play-by-play commentary is repetitive and pronounced with strange inflections, as if a robot is sitting in the announcer's box. CPU opponents are too easy, and while most of the presentation looks great, the crowd is exceptionally blurry when the camera gets close. Despite these minor drawbacks, this is the perfect party game for anyone with even a passing interest in soccer.





Reflections: *International Superstar Soccer 64* is surprisingly good, especially considering it was one of the earlier N64 soccer titles. Not to oversell it, but it reminded me of experiencing these games for the first time when I was younger. I felt oddly nostalgic about the idea of a lounge room of soccer-loving kids (or a dorm room of soccer-loving college students) spending hours tackling the game's many multiplayer options. *Mundial Ronaldinho Soccer 64*, a bootleg ROM hack version of *ISS 64*, was released in Brazil. You can learn more about this in the Special Cartridges section of this guide. – RR

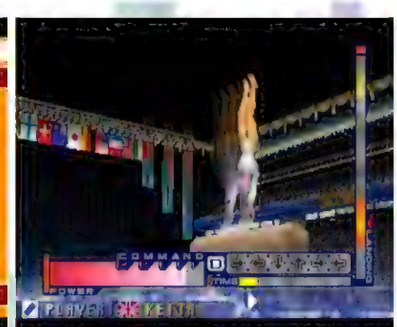
European Cartridge

International Track & Field 2000

International Track & Field: Summer Games (EU)
Ganbare! Nippon! Olympics 2000 (JP)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

Compete against the world's best athletes in this 3D multi-event Olympic sports title. Jump right into Championship Mode, a random collection of eight events with points tallied at the end, or, if time is a factor, Trial Mode lets players tackle a single event. Many of the featured 14 Olympic events utilize rapid-pace alternating button spamming (C-left/C-right or A/B) to build power or speed, such as 100m Dash and 100m Freestyle, which are straightforward. Others combine this rapid button pressing with a timing of the Z button, such as 110m Hurdles, Long Jump, High Jump, Triple Jump, Javelin Throw, Pole Vault, and Weightlifting. However, 100m Breaststroke involves alternating timed L and R button presses to achieve maximum stroke power, Hammer Throw has the player rotate the Control Stick clockwise or press the D-pad in a circular motion to build throwing power, and Trap Shooting has the player lining up a cursor to shoot the clay skeets. Finally, Horizontal Bar and Vault both require pulling off moves with timed sequence presses of the Control Stick or D-pad, making these two events more challenging and engaging than most. A helpful tutorial precedes each event. Ten are available at the start, while the remaining four must be unlocked by achieving bronze or silver medals in all the others. Despite the monotony of some events, the visual presentation is beautiful. From the pre-event theatrics to watching an instant replay following the competition, the visuals are good enough to overlook the simple gameplay. If button-mashing friends come over, four players can compete together, mostly in alternating fashion except for a few events. The Expansion Pak doesn't make the experience any less repetitive, but it does improve the already impressive graphics, while the Rumble Pak adds a little punch to specific events. This combination of beauty and monotony is certainly not for everyone. However, those who enjoy the Summer Olympics should appreciate the quality presentation and variety of events on display.

Reflections: To access all the events without first going through Championship Mode, the famous "Konami Code" (UP, UP, DOWN, DOWN, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, B, A) at the title screen will unlock them. *International Track & Field 2000* was part of a growing trend of "rental only" releases that hit Blockbuster shelves but not retail stores. A couple of SNES games fall into this category, and the experiment extended through the Nintendo 64 days into the GameCube era. Unsurprisingly, many of these games are not fondly remembered, though many will fetch a pretty penny owing to their rarity (not this one, however). In the majority of cases, this exclusivity was a blessing. Renters needed only a couple of days and a couple of bucks to experience all that *International Track & Field 2000* has to offer. – KS

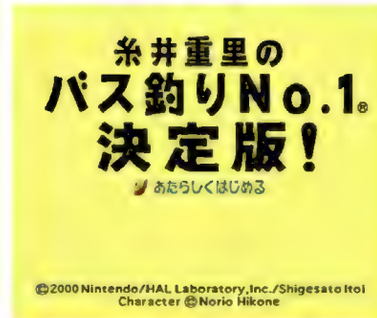


European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Itoi Shigesato no Bass Tsuri No. 1 Ketteiban!

[Shigesato Itoi's No. 1 Bass Fishing Definitive Edition!]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆



The anthropomorphic animal citizens of Tsurizuki Village are all very involved in the local pastime of fishing. In this enhanced version of the Super Famicom's *Itoi Shigesato no Bass Tsuri No. 1*, players can learn the strategies the residents (and real-life game designer Itoi Shigesato) have to offer while exploring the various waterways around the village. Indoor locations appear as 2D renditions of 3D environments with menus to carry out actions. Each in-game day begins at the Club House, where there are events to join and friends to invite for some rod-and-reel action. After leaving the Club House, the player walks through the first-person 3D environment outdoors to either go to another building, such as the lure shop or rental boat house, or towards a body of water to begin catching the bass swimming among the other fish. When standing in a spot where fishing is allowed, a symbol in the upper right changes from "NO" to "OK." With or without the compatible Tsurikon 64 fishing rod controller, movements and actions are intuitive and responsive. While casting, a new window displays the lure underwater as the bass responds to the rod, which the player moves with the Control Stick. Lures react differently based on where the player is holding the rod. Once a fish is on the hook, visual indicators appear around the lure window, and a friendly animal face at the top of the screen reacts to how stressed the line is and how successfully the reeling is going. Each caught bass earns acorns for purchasing more goodies for the tackle box, including various spinners, jigs, and worms. Success at tournaments and challenges with the residents can open access to locations beyond the starter area of Nono Lake. In addition to walking manually, players can quickly travel to any location by selecting it on the map in the Z-button menu. There is no ending, but meeting certain conditions, like collecting all types of lures or catching 50 bass measuring 50 cm or more in length, earns collectible treasures (which do not affect the gameplay). The graphics are fun, with a great juxtaposition of the realistic environments and action with the cartoon-like characters. The lack of a final goal or ending may stop some players from diving too deep into these imaginary waterways. However, there is enough exploration and excitement in the activities around Tsurizuki Village (in addition to customizable settings) to keep others hooked, whether for casual fun or a demanding challenge.

Reflections: If Shigesato Itoi sounds like a familiar name, you would be right – he is the founder of Ape and the creator of the Mother/EarthBound series. If you think it is strange that he would dabble in fishing games, check out his still-updated blog (1101.com) to see the full spectrum of his interests. I appreciate that to this day, Shigesato writes for his site, which is older than this game. I have nothing but respect for someone who can keep up with a project like that for so long! – KY

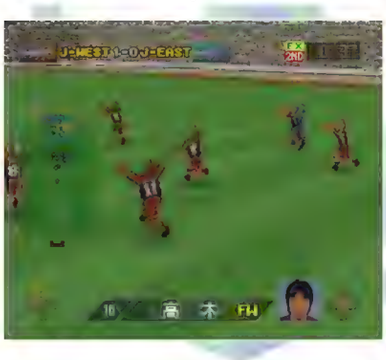
This title was advertised as being compatible with the Tsuricon 64 fishing rod and reel controller.

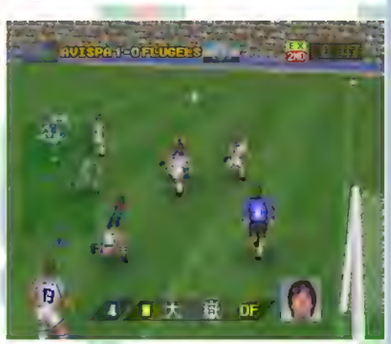
J.League Dynamite Soccer 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: A-Max
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆

Like top-down arcade-style action with authentic teams and players? Up to four players (maximum of two per team) can take on the best of the J-League in this soccer title. All the standard game modes are here: single-match Exhibition, League mode between the 17 clubs, Tournament mode where players pick three or more teams to include, All-Star match between Japan East and Japan West, and Penalty Kick mode. Starting a match is quick and easy despite any language barrier. The team selection screen shows a graphic of the team's region and their respective player uniforms. Although there is an official license, no team or player statistics exist. The gameplay and animations are smooth, and watching the blocky-style players run around the pitch is enjoyable. Match presentation is effective and unobtrusive, with digitized player portraits and names, a mini-map showing player positions, and real-time tactics (chosen with the D-pad). It has some noticeable problems, however. One glaring issue is the lack of a player cursor in single-player mode, making it difficult to know who the player controls. On top of that, the perspective automatically shifts control to the two players closest to the ball. Shooting and passing can take some getting used to, as both require pointing the analog stick in the direction the ball will go. Aiming passes can be particularly frustrating when carrying the ball in one direction and wanting to pass in another, especially when trying to avoid the opponent's players. Combined with the automatic control shift, it takes precision passing skills to maintain possession. Scoring also proves challenging, as set plays are almost impossible to pull off, and keeper AI is excellent. The penalty kick system is standard; tilt the Control Stick in a direction and push the A button. Control is quite sensitive in this mode, so only slight movement is required. The menu music is fine, but the sound effects are rudimentary and tinny. The background sound from the crowd during a match is annoying and cannot be turned off. The digitized voice quality is excellent but sparse since there are no announcers. This serviceable soccer outing has some frustrating quirks) that works better as a multiplayer experience.

Reflections: I normally enjoy sports games with a more arcade feel, but the frustrating controls made it difficult for me to remain interested in *J.League Dynamite Soccer 64*. I also could not get over the incessant drumming and audible crowd noise with no commentary to break it up. Unfortunately, the negative elements overshadow the positive ones here, such as the player animations, frame rate, and presentation. – BC





J.League Eleven Beat 1997

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

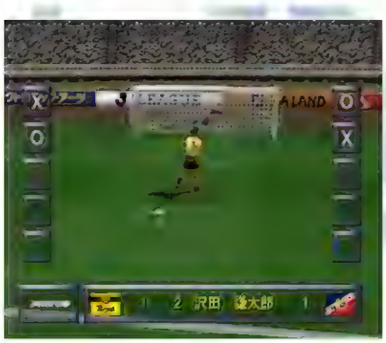
This fun take on top-down arcade-style soccer does not take itself too seriously! Hudson's arcade approach to the global game features officially licensed J.League teams. The camera angle is unique because it dynamically changes from wide-angle to vertical views depending on the action. It can take some getting used to, but it follows the action fluidly. Several play modes exist to keep things fresh: Pre-season exhibition match, Official J.League play, Tournament mode, Penalty Kicks, and All-Star mode. Also available is Original League mode, where players can create their own league from the available teams. The options menu allows trading players on existing clubs, making a new team, and even doing practice training without an opponent. Starting a match is straightforward, as the selection screen only shows a small team flag and their name. Options include stadium type, time of day, weather, and minutes per half. Controls are tight, responsive, and easy to learn. Some acrobatic moves, such as diving headbutt passes or bicycle kicks, are easy to do as they only depend on the relative position of the ball and the player. Defensive moves include satisfyingly aggressive slide tackles and shoulder tackles, with the latter more likely to draw a foul. However, the casual refereeing makes for a more physical brand of soccer than usual. Passing is accurate, but spotting targets can be easier via the minimap than the actual field. Simple plays are easy to execute, such as toe punting in the goal's direction and pressing the A button to kick. Players can change in-game strategies on the fly to adjust attack or defense play styles. Only the players closest to the ball can be controlled, though this rarely hinders play. Player cursors, turned off by default, can be turned on in the options menu. Penalty kicks are reaction-based, with a simple movement mechanic that makes both kicking and defending the goal intuitive. The player characters are cartoony, and the accompanying sound effects and animations follow suit for a very entertaining match. The music during play is good but might get repetitive after a while. For those looking for an accessible arcade-style way to enjoy J.League soccer, this entry is worth a chance, especially with a few friends.

Reflections: *J.League Eleven Beat 1997* is a very playful little game. I didn't feel bogged down by complicated controls or figuring out where the action was. Without player stats, you can just pick whatever team name, flag, or colors suit you. The length of matches seemed just right to keep the arcade feel. I love the sound effect of slide-tackling the opponent, but when that didn't work, I really enjoyed taking my frustration out on them with a punch to the back. Hee hee! – BC

J.League Live 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Electronic Arts Victor
Publisher: Electronic Arts Victor
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

The world's most popular sport is back with a wide-angle view and a J.League twist. Up to four friends can challenge each other with Exhibition games, Full or Half Seasons, Tournament play, or a Penalty Shootout. Menu screens have a straightforward setup that minimizes any language barrier's impact. The team selection screen lacks team statistics but shows a large and well-detailed image of the chosen team's mascot, making team selection more fun than usual. The Controller Select screen allows players to assign controllers, determine the difficulty, and choose between simple or advanced controller schemes. Multiple options for camera, managing, and game settings can be configured to suit any play style; these can be set before or during a match. Player control is sluggish and takes some getting used to for optimal timing. Often, the opposing players seem to take control or get in the way of the ball while in mid-kick, which can be frustrating. The button press duration determines the power of passes and shots, so passing quickly and far requires some forethought. The Advanced controller scheme may be an option for the seasoned footballer, but there are no on-screen button layouts, so having the instruction manual at hand is a must. The AI is below expectations for a simulation game – with only a little practice, it becomes pretty easy to avoid opponents and score, even on higher difficulty settings. The presentation is above average, with easily navigable menus, colorful mascots, several camera angles, and a clear, visible pitch and players. Unfortunately, the graphics lack detail, with indistinguishable player models. Menu music is good, with energetic tracks that don't wear out their welcome. In-game sounds are also solid, with a great crowd reaction sound when the play heats up. The action is by no means fast-paced, and an unwelcome drop in framerate sometimes exacerbates the fact. This serviceable soccer outing focuses heavily on the simulation aspect with an incredibly detailed advanced control scheme that will appeal to more technical players.



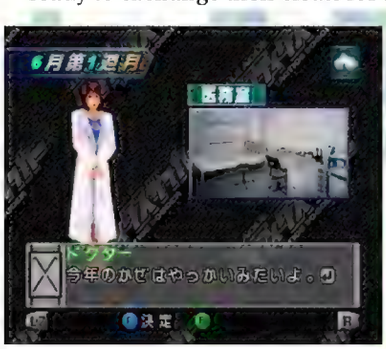
Reflections: In my time playing the Japanese version of *FIFA Soccer 64* (which *J.League Live 64* could be considered, save for some minor audiovisual changes and the different clubs/rosters), I had some memorable moments of passing plays that ended in a successful one-timer, but it wasn't as satisfying as I had hoped. The controls were more than adequate without the advanced scheme. I preferred Arcade mode, as this equalized player statistics and eliminated fatigue, making the action slightly faster. Some aspects stood out, such as the crowd swells and the range of different camera angles, but add it all up, and the entire experience felt average. – BC

J.League Tactics Soccer

Genre: Sports, Strategy
Release Date: Jan. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: ASCII Entertainment
Publisher: ASCII Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

Become the manager of any of J.League's 18 officially licensed clubs and players in this soccer management simulator. Warm up to the coaching position with single standalone games against the computer or a friend, or tackle an entire season of play in J.League mode. Before a match starts, each team can set its starting lineups. There is no direct control of the field players, as gameplay centers on changing their playstyle and strategy to gain an advantage. Pausing the action enables substitutions or picking from camera angles that focus directly on the ball, player, or a zoomed-out "TV" perspective. In J. League mode, four players can be created and assigned to the team after picking one of the 18 teams and naming the manager. The owners will then introduce themselves and tour the facilities accessible from the menus. The gym is where to set player-specific training. The office menus enable receiving advice from assistant coaches and looking up various soccer terms and strategies in the glossary. At the beginning of each month, the manager sets the itinerary on the calendar and assigns days in between matches for practice, days of prayer, and fan appreciation events. Individual player training is key; investing in each player's unique training schedule to focus on specific abilities like passing, defending, endurance, etc., will gradually increase their attributes in that skill set throughout the season. Careful team monitoring is critical for a successful season. Players will constantly have to rotate whenever injuries happen or if they can benefit from a rest day. The team intentionally starts the season with a low ranking, and ownership warns that failing to achieve specific league ranking criteria at certain points throughout the season will cost the coach their job. One last mode of play, the unlockable Universal Cup, sets up a global tournament to determine the world's best soccer club. The presentation of the management menus is pleasantly laid out and intuitive to grasp, while the in-game visuals have adequate player models and animation. Appropriately soothing melodies play while perusing menus, while gameplay audio stands out with boisterous, chant-heavy crowds. This sim is a solid place to start for players ready to exchange their cleats for a clipboard.

Reflections: In North America, sports management sims were primarily released on PC and not that common on consoles during this timeframe, so it is no surprise this remained a Japanese exclusive. Having random seasonal occasions, like a player departing the team to train abroad or being alerted of scouts in attendance for the Japanese national team, made all the time involved in planning for each game a worthwhile effort. Fan appreciation events had the most amusing moments, such as picking up garbage to keep the community clean or boosting player morale after receiving chocolates from admirers. – DK



Jangō Simulation Mahjong-dō 64

[Strong Player Simulation: Mahjong Road 64]
Genre: Tile Game, Gambling
Release Date: July 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Art
Publisher: Video System
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Rare
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆

Mahjong is an all-or-nothing tile game of creating a winning hand, where the success of a round sits on the chances of drawing one of a few tiles. As one of 16 available tile sharks, the player takes on the others through three game modes in bright 2D cartoon graphics. Story mode features the characters racing to become the first to hold 10 million G (in-game currency) through game winnings from a starting 2 million. From an overhead view of a city map, the player selects one of several locations to play out their mahjong dreams. The opponents move to different areas randomly at the start of every month, which is the timeframe of each mahjong game. Before being sent to the simplistic topside table view with 3D tiles, the player chooses their opponents from those present and three dealers who are not part of the competition. The goal is to make a winning hand (mainly sequences and sets) based on the numbers and suit of the tiles, which each person singularly draws and discards every turn. The first person to call a complete hand wins the round, earning points from the other players. After a full 16-round game, each person's performance results in a score and corresponding gain or loss of G. Every six months, all competitors gather in one parlor for a single-elimination tournament players must pay into. A higher buy-in results in more earnings if they place near the top. While quintupling a coin purse can be a long, slow process, there is the shorter format of a one-on-one mode where the player takes on each opponent individually in a ladder tournament. For an even quicker affair, a one-off four-person game is also available. The rules and settings are adjustable for each game type, providing additional variety and customization. The selection of modes and the sheer length of the main one make for a substantial experience for any tile enthusiast. The mahjong visuals are rather uninspired, presenting the same table and tileset for every game. However, when someone wins, the camera does a pleasing swing and zooms into the winning hand for dramatics. In contrast, the city map and character portraits are colorful and more varied, and each person has several facial expressions depending on their performance.

There is little instruction or hints for those new to riichi (Japanese) mahjong, so beginners may struggle. This mahjong experience provides a character story and the long-term goal of making it rich to incentivize the hours spent on gambling for just the right tile to show up.

Reflections: There are minor backstories for each character, and they don't make much of a difference in how the games play out, but that didn't stop me from falling in love with the big brute with the cat on his shoulder! I wish each location had something visually different during play – maybe different colors or patterns for the table and tiles. It's certainly not a point that would stop me from playing this. There is enough outside of the mahjong to avert monotony without being so much that I couldn't jump into a save after months of not playing. – KY

Jeopardy!

Genre: Game Show, Trivia
Release Date: Feb. 1998
Region: NA
Developer: GameTek
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Features: None
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Dust off the old thinking cap in preparation for this interactive adaptation of the hit three-player trivia game show. Camera perspectives sit directly in front of the iconic blue board but will cut to show close-ups of questions and contestants. There are two preliminary rounds of trivia, each with 30 ranked clues of various dollar amounts that get more difficult the more they're worth. Players select a category and value, receive an "answer," and then attempt to buzz in first to input the correct response in the form of a question. Get it wrong, and the money is deducted from the player's total rather than added. Hidden "Daily Double" clues let the discoverer wager earnings and answer a question only available to them. Values double in the second round, "Double Jeopardy," but the rules otherwise remain the same. After two rounds, contestants with positive totals advance to "Final Jeopardy," where they secretly wage any amount of their winnings and privately respond to one final clue. The player with the highest total after this round is declared the winner. Three difficulties of clues and computer AI contestants are available that offer sufficient levels of competition. An intuitive A-Z graphical interface lets players enter responses letter by letter. There is also an option to recognize "loose" spellings that may be a letter off and another option to enable Computer Assisted Responses, where the CPU will auto-generate the response the player enters after only keying in the first few characters. If the generated response is satisfactory, the player can press the R button to auto-fill to complete the rest or just hit the "Enter" button. The stage design and player podiums are accurately replicated, and small window-sized video clips of host Alex Trebek are presented throughout the gameplay. The show's vintage theme song is reproduced well, along with the dulcet version used for "Final Jeopardy." The main drawbacks to the experience are the lifeless, non-animated contestant models and a lack of a save function to keep track of user stats. These minor misses do not keep this from being a satisfactory rendition of the show and a surefire hit for multiplayer trivia sessions.

Reflections: Alex Trebek had a stellar 36-year run as the host of *Jeopardy!* – about a month before writing this review, he passed away after a public battle with pancreatic cancer. The television show and its video games were a staple in my household for many years, so writing this review has been a bittersweet endeavor. Seeing him again in N64 full-motion-video form (and a bonus audio farewell from Alex in the closing credits) was certainly heartwarming. Rest in peace, Alex, and infinite thanks for forging an institution of erudite entertainment as only you could provide. – DK

Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

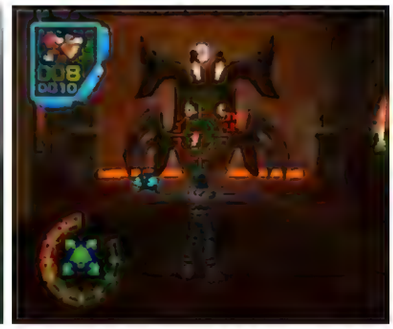
Be the next big motocross racing star, playing as "Showtime" McGrath himself, one of his real-life competitors, or a user-created custom rider! This third-person racer has four modes to try: Race, Series, Time Trials, and Freestyle. Race is a single round of laps on one of the eight indoor Supercross stadium tracks or eight outdoor motocross tracks. Series allows racers to go through the gamut of one type of track or all 16 of both indoor/outdoor, with points awarded based on placement. Freestyle gives a racer two minutes and a variety of ramps and other structures to perform tricks, something for which Jeremy McGrath was known. Before each race, players can freely adjust their bikes with eight different horsepower-to-RPM settings and options for tires, spring stiffness, and transmission type. Handling on the bikes is smooth, and the differences among the choices are perceptible. However, the physics makes the action too easy as only direct, head-on collisions or landing on objects can cause a total wipeout. This does not happen that often since the track barriers (visible and not) confine the action to a narrow space. The motorbike selection feels like it has the most considerable effect on the ability to win, not maneuvering skill. If a player takes a corner too wide or rams into a barrier, they still may have a chance to catch up if their bike is fast enough. From the Game Settings menu, the weather can be set for outdoor races to always be fair or random, just in case biking through a pelting sheet of rain seems fun on top of the already muddy graphics without much visual diversity. Players can create a custom rider by choosing their name, number, and suit (from a choice of eight). There is also the ability to create and race on a custom Supercross track, with a simple and intuitive interface and plenty of options for each feature. The music features appropriately intense rock songs by The Offspring and Counterpoint, in addition to ones specifically produced for the game. The racing experience is neither overtly bad nor broken, but there is not enough challenge or fun to keep it interesting unless players compete against friends on the couch.

Reflections: Let my most enjoyable experience playing *Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000* illustrate my feelings: I was racing far ahead of my opponents. I looked away from the screen for a second, then rammed straight into a wall. Once my racer got back onto his bike, I let him sit there while taking some notes. All the other racers lapped around to catch up, and because I respawned in the middle of the track, one by one, they took a spill from hitting the back of my bike. I couldn't stop laughing at all their sprites splayed out on the ground. It was hilarious. You don't need to make your opponents eat your dust when you can make them eat the dirt instead. – KY

European Cartridge

Jet Force Gemini

Star Twins (JP)
Genre: Third-Person Shooter, Action-Adventure
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Rareware
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



The future is in peril from tyrant Mizar and his horde of minions, and only the Jet Force Gemini team stands in his way! Play as the pistol-wielding space cop Juno as he explores beautiful, detailed planets in this combat-heavy third-person perspective adventure. Along the way, the player must rescue oppressed allies, infiltrate villainous strongholds, and reunite with squadmates Vela (Juno's twin sister) and Lupus (a canine companion). Each playable character has a unique ability that helps explore new areas: Juno can walk on lava, Vela can swim, and Lupus can hover with his jetpack. Planets are divided into levels blocked by sealed doors that only open once eliminating all nearby enemies. Players will use several destructive weapons, including a rapid-fire machine gun, a long-range sniper rifle, and an explosive tri-rocket launcher. An unorthodox control scheme switches character movement from the analog stick to the C-buttons upon encountering foes, freeing up the former for aiming. Combat requires a quick trigger finger, precise aiming, and creative tactics to handle a diverse set of enemies, like needing to flank shielded foes or surgically removing perched snipers. Competitive multiplayer features include shootout modes, target practice, and racing games. A co-op mode allows a second player to control Floyd, a robot that fires from above the first player's shoulder. Halfway through, players will have to start backtracking across planets to retrieve hundreds of collectibles, which is essential to avoiding a catastrophic ending. If the player gets through most of a level and realizes they need a squadmate's abilities, they must swap characters and start over at the beginning of the planet, which will be restocked with enemies and locked doors. This detail turns an otherwise exciting experience into an exercise in frustration. Fun combat and a polished presentation make for a memorable experience overall, but the item collecting and tedious character-switching mechanic hurt its enjoyability.

Reflections: *Jet Force Gemini*'s mode-switching control scheme was initially a big source of frustration for me. I adapted after a short while, so it didn't impact my enjoyment. By contrast, the grind of repetitively clearing old levels to obtain collectibles did affect my enjoyment. Backtracking was a fatiguing process compared to the joys of the early game. The longer I played, the less I wanted to keep playing. *Jet Force Gemini* will do the trick if you want exciting run-and-gun action in a polished universe with solid combat mechanics. However, if you're dedicated to completing the game, don't be surprised if your patience is greatly diminished before the finale. – JM

European Cartridge

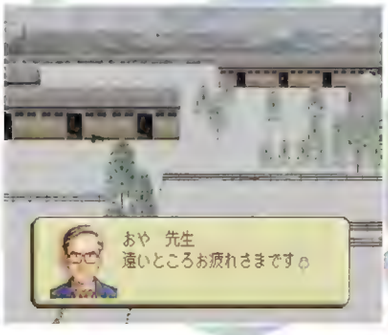
Japanese Cartridge
Star Twins

Jikkyō GI Stable

[Real G1 Stable]
Genre: Sports, Simulation
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Nagoya
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆

Pursue horse racing immortality in this sports simulation that is as deep as it is aesthetically pleasing. Command every aspect of assembling a growing stable of thoroughbreds while competing on the GI circuit – Japan's greatest high-stakes races. The gameplay consists of two core elements: training horses and managing a business. Players must properly prepare their equines before hitting the dirt or turf. Both races and the off-track action feature colorful and cartoonish horses, riders, and setpieces as 2D projections of 3D models. This technique is especially noticeable on the turns of tracks. Off-track management combines rendered isometric setpieces with 2D portraits and sprites for people, which gives the dialog boxes and menus an RPG feel. The depth of the experience is impressive. Preparing horses for competition could mean practicing under certain weather conditions or on certain tracks. Sometimes, horses need a breather, and time to graze could be the competitive edge. Once races get underway, the results are out of the player's hands. A brief, simulated race plays out where owners soon learn if their management decisions leading up to the competition result in victory. The presentation is similar to a television broadcast, with multiple views of the action. An enthusiastic crowd accompanies the sound of clopping hooves for the minute it takes to view a race. The decisions made away from the track are similarly critical to building a stable of winners. The management choices taken are of great consequence. Poor decision-making can doom efforts early, whether by handling horses poorly or choosing the wrong people to add to the support team. Hire and fire staff members of various disciplines, each of whom contributes to the success of horses on the track. Running a winning stable and business office improves the player's reputation among peers, leading to more attractive options when bolstering a team, but horses only race for so long. For sustained success, winners must breed. Successfully creating a lineage of winning horses can create hours of gameplay. There are stimuli in all corners of this experience. From impressive visuals to the pleasing soundtrack and a play-by-play call of every race run, the experience is robust. While this appeals to enthusiasts of one of our most ancient sports, it's ultimately a simulation that many can enjoy.

Reflections: Play *Jikkyō GI Stable* long enough, and you will not soon forget your winners and losers. There is plenty of trial and error owing to the incredible number of options when training your horses. I had stable after stable filled with mistakes. Fortunately, the game does a good job of letting you know if you're headed in the right direction, straight down to the morose facial expressions of your jockeys after finishing at the back of the pack. Royal Charger was a loser, as was Blue Swords. Arctic Star made a little progress. Finally, winning took hold, but only after discovering the horse with a lesson in his name: Hail to Reason was my first equine to garner top honors. – KS



Jikkyō J.League Perfect Striker

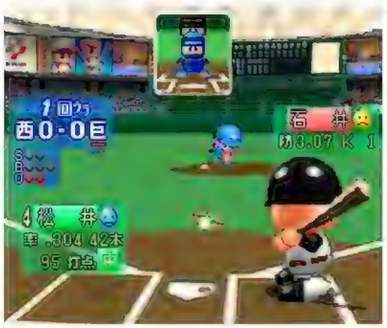
[Real J.League Perfect Striker]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: JP
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

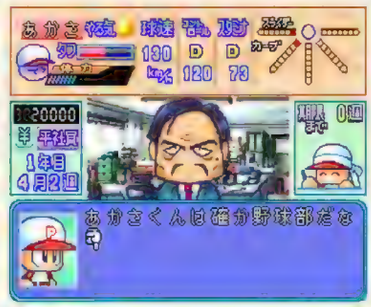
Players of all skill levels, perfect or otherwise, can kick it around in this first of many licensed J.League soccer titles for the Nintendo 64. Take a turn with a one-off match, practice penalty kicks, or do some free training before taking a crack at Tournament mode or embarking on the J.League Challenge mode, a season-long trial playing 30 matches, facing each team twice. If players win the season, they can play a secret exhibition to unlock Japan Dreams, World Dreams, and World Stars teams. The Scenario mode places players in 16 different scenarios taken directly from the previous J.League season, increasing replayability. A broadcast camera perspective provides a field of view large enough that the ball rarely gets lost; when it does travel off-screen, the mini-map adequately indicates the ball and player locations. The controls have a tight feel and are very responsive, which keeps players engaged. Moves such as sprinting, stutter steps, lob passes, and slide tackles are intuitive to learn and are not overly complicated, adding appeal for beginners. More complex skills are available, such as the one-two pass and set plays (configured before matches start and executable with the combination of Z and C-buttons). These provide enough variety to allow advanced players to hone their skills. Player and keeper control are set to Auto by default, which works well when following the play; advanced players may want to modify it to Semi-auto or Manual control. For penalty kicks, each player has a cursor to aim. The keeper can try to follow the kicker's cursor to try and stop the ball. Customization features include creating a player via the Options menu for players to personalize their teams. The visuals are above average, and player models are big enough to see their great animations complement the smooth gameplay. The sound effects are realistic and don't get annoying over extended periods. The play-by-play announcer's voices are clear and exuberant and don't detract from the overall experience. This quality soccer experience perfectly balances the depth of gameplay for seasoned footballers and accessibility for newer players, and its high-quality presentation makes it all the more enjoyable.

Reflections: Konami seems to understand how to balance gameplay, controls, and visuals to create an engaging soccer title. This hit was made as a follow-up to *J.League Jikkyō Winning Eleven '97* for PlayStation, was the foundation for hits like *Jikkyō World Soccer 3 / International Superstar Soccer 64*, and kicked off the Perfect Striker franchise, which saw four additional titles released on Sony consoles. I was really pulled in by the addictive experience of trying out new plays and tactics. Once I got a feel for the gameplay, I had to turn up the difficulty to really challenge myself. – BC

Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 2000

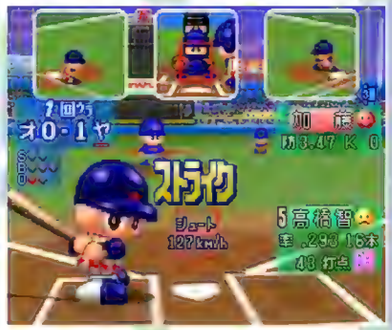
[Real Powerful Pro Baseball 2000]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 2000
Region: JP
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Password Save, Transfer Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆☆





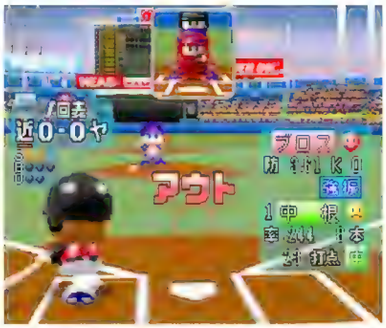
Konami's perennial arcade-style baseball series trots out to the mound with its fourth iteration on the N64! Up-to-date Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) rosters for the 2000 season are available for play. Modes include full seasons, exhibitions, home run derby, popping into high-leverage situations (tied in the 9th inning, for example), and the RPG-like Success Mode. The action is from a perspective behind home plate during at-bats. Pitchers must aim the ball while changing up location, velocity, and rotation to fool opposing batters. Batters must swing at the right area at the correct time to drive the ball. When the ball is put in play, the perspective shifts to a top-down view while defenders chase after the ball using a novel mechanic in which their control icon flashes pink when they are in the right spot to catch a fly ball. In this year's iteration of Success Mode, player-created characters have already graduated from university. They must spend their time working a job while they compete on a club baseball team composed of the company's employees competing against teams from other companies in the area. Despite the humble origins, making the NPB is still possible for the truly dedicated. Spend too much time training or investing too much money on baseball equipment, and a disaster at work will ensue, destroying any dreams of professional baseball glory! Created players who have made the NPB already can be utilized in other modes and transferred to separate copies via password. Players can also be copied, via the Transfer Pak, from Game Boy Color spinoff *Power Pro Kun Pocket 2*, a romantic visual novel set in a baseball context. The excellent controls are very complex, especially for pitchers, which makes accessibility a challenge for newcomers. The super-deformed visuals are astonishingly charming; every frame is packed with visual polish and attention to detail. The music and sound augment the experience with a bright and appealing auditory milieu. This title delivers a dynamite, immersive baseball experience that testifies with every polygon to the love with which it was developed.

Reflections: The naming convention for this title changed from the numbered editions that led up to it (*4*, *5*, and *6*) because the development of the mainline series had shifted over to Sony's PlayStation 2 for *7*, also released in 2000. This situation is not unusual for the series, as it had minimally-updated budget editions released on almost every console, from the Super Famicom to the PlayStation, Dreamcast, and Wii. Getting this particular version of the game should matter only to those who want to experience the new Success Mode, as precious little else has changed from *Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 6*. – JM



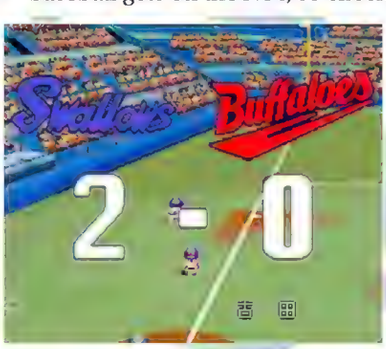
Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 4

[Real Powerful Pro Baseball 4]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1997
Region: JP
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Password Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆☆



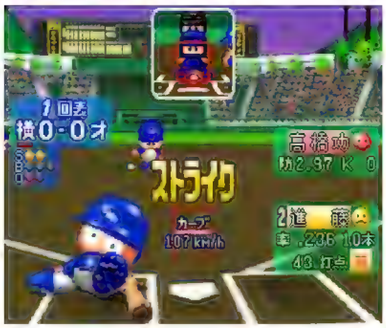
Strive for arcade-style baseball glory with real Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) players! Available modes include exhibition games, full seasons, playoffs, and Success Mode, a humorous RPG-style experience in which the player controls an up-and-coming player of their own creation trying to make it to the NPB. The perspective is initially behind home plate during at-bats, which are dynamic and entertaining experiences. Pitchers need to throw toward their desired location, while batters aim their swing precisely on the ball if they want to make solid contact. Upon contact, the camera shifts to a top-down perspective as the defender pursues using a system in which the icon above the fielder's head turns bright pink when in position to field the ball. In Success Mode, train hard to impress the coach and build up skills, but players won't be able to stick solely to training if they want to succeed. Focusing entirely on baseball instead of a healthy mental/physical life balance can result in players slipping into depression or requiring hospitalization; think twice when getting the option to blow off a dinner date to work on that swing! If someone makes the pros, they are added to an NPB team's roster for use in the other modes, so dedicated players can find the league littered with their avatars. A novel password system also allows taking created players to a friend's cartridge! The controls are responsive but very complicated, which makes learning the basics overwhelming. For example, selecting a pitch requires a specific direction on the analog stick, but discerning which pitch corresponds to each one is difficult without some reference material. The graphics and presentation feature a super-deformed art style that is sickeningly cute perfection. The animations, menus, sound, music, and environments are crafted with great charm to match the unique art style. Despite a steep learning curve, this is as good as baseball gets on the N64, so check it out!

Reflections: My primary experience with *Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 4* was me desperately wishing that I could read Japanese! Success Mode sounds right up my alley as a long-time devotee of create-a-player modes in American sports games. What I could experience with a bit of translation help was enjoyable, but moving through it without the ability to read was highly ponderous. The baseball mechanics are tremendous, though, so even if Success Mode is out of reach for you, there is a ton of fun to be had here. – JM



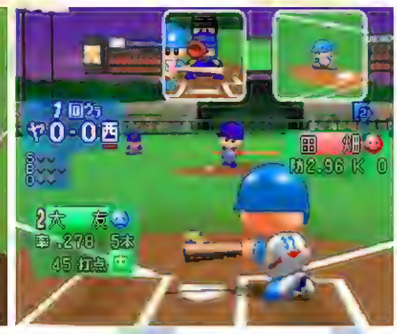
Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 5

[Real Powerful Pro Baseball 5]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1998
Region: JP
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Passwords Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆☆



Japan's popular arcade-style baseball series returns with its second release on the Nintendo 64! Up-to-date rosters for the 1998 season of Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) are playable in exhibition games, full seasons, and playoffs. There is also Success Mode, a lighthearted role-playing experience where created players progress from high school to pro baseball. The action is viewed from a perspective behind home plate during at-bats, which require strategy and quick reflexes to ensure victory. Pitchers must aim the ball while applying the right speed and curve to baffle opposing batters. On the other hand, batters need to swing at the right spot and at the right time if they want to make solid contact. Once the ball is in play, the camera shifts to a top-down perspective while the defense attempts to catch it and send it back to the infield. The defensive play relies on a novel system in which the icon above the fielder's head flashes a different color when in position to catch the ball successfully. Success Mode is an immersive experience that requires hard choices to balance the avatar's skill and personal growth. Failing to allow time off from the grind to study or socialize means frequent trips to the hospital and poor mental health that saps away the effectiveness of a rigorous training program. After beating the odds and making the pros, the created character is added to an NPB roster, fulfilling his dreams of pro baseball success. A clever password system also permits transporting created players to any game copy! The controls are solid but complex, which buries some of the appeal behind a steep difficulty curve. This fact is particularly true for pitching, which has a fiendishly complicated control scheme. The charming, super-deformed art style is consistently applied throughout the animations, menus, and environments and makes every second of play a visual delight. An uplifting soundtrack and pleasing sound design mirror the visual polish. Despite being an imposing challenge for newcomers, this delightful experience offers a diverse set of baseball experiences for a wide range of players!

Reflections: Unfortunately for baseball fans outside of Japan, the only consolized attempts to bring the series' super-deformed approach to baseball westward were *MLB Power Pros* (PS2, Wii) and *MLB Power Pros 2008* (PS2, Wii, DS). These releases include Major League Baseball-focused Success Modes that don't require familiarity with Japanese. If the language barrier seems too imposing to enjoy the series, or if you'd just appreciate playing with and alongside MLB teams and players, one of these titles may be the way to go. – JM

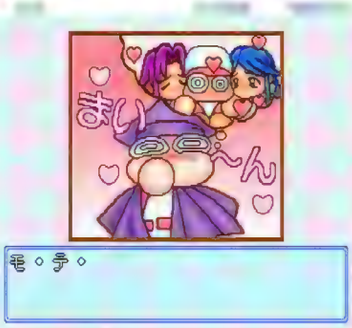


Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 6

[Real Powerful Pro Baseball 6]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: JP
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Password Save, Transfer Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆☆

Konami's annually updated arcade-style baseball series returns to the diamond with its third entry on the N64! Up-to-date rosters for the 1999 Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) season are available for play. Available modes include full seasons, dropping into high-pressure situations on the fly (think the bottom of the 9th, bases loaded), exhibition games, home run derby, and the series' signature Success Mode. The baseball action is viewed from a behind-home plate perspective during the showdowns between pitcher and batter. Pitchers must aim the ball while mixing up their speed and spin to baffle opposing batters. Batters must line up their swing at just the right spot and unleash their cut at the correct time to make solid contact. Upon contact, perspective shifts to a top-down view while the defense pursues using a unique mechanic in which fielders' control icon flashes pink when they're in the right spot to catch a fly ball. Success Mode is an RPG-like experience in which created characters grind through university baseball in the hopes of making the NPB. There's an original story associated with each university, but the experience always involves balancing the perfection of baseball skills with appropriate relaxation and socialization. Failure can come from being too lax in training or injury and depression that result from overwork, so choose carefully! Created players can be used in other modes and transferred to separate copies via password. Share more players via the Transfer Pak from Konami's Game Boy Color spinoff *Power Pro Kun Pocket*, which takes an approach more akin to Japanese romantic visual novels than a pure sports game. The excellent controls are complex, especially for pitchers, which makes unlocking the fun challenging for newcomers. The super-deformed art style oozes an unforgettably cutesy charm. The soundtrack is limited in variety but excellent in quality, with a rollicking main menu track, a catchy jingle during play, and consistently satisfying sound effects. While possibly intimidating for new players, it offers an alluring personality and engaging play experience to all comers willing to master the surprising depths within.

Reflections: Annually updated sports games are tricky to execute well and frequently become stale, several versions in. This series, however, laid the prototypical groundwork for how modern sports games add value from year to year, as including an in-depth story mode is now a common feature for titles like Madden and NFL 2K. Including these features lets the player truly get in the game by creating themselves as the superstar that they always dreamed of being. It adds some flavor to the repetitive nature of annually rolling out your favorite team's new roster to the World Series, Super Bowl, or NBA Finals with the same or similar game mechanics. – JM



Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū Basic-Ban 2001

[Real Powerful Pro Baseball Basic Edition 2001]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 2001
Region: JP
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Controller Pak Save, Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆

Konami's cute and annual arcade-style baseball series jogs in from the bullpen in its fifth and final appearance on the N64! Up-to-date rosters for the 2001 Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) season are available for play. A limited variety of playable modes includes full seasons, exhibition games, home run derby, and a generous selection of roster editing options. The action is viewed from a behind-home-plate perspective during at-bats. Pitchers aim the ball while mixing up location, velocity, and rotation to keep opposing batters on their toes. Batters must line up their swing precisely on the ball at the correct time to make solid contact. Once the ball is put in play, perspective shifts to a top-down view while defenders pursue the ball using a unique mechanic in which the fielder's control icon flashes pink when they are in the right spot to reel in a fly ball. The excellent controls are also quite complicated, particularly when pitching, making life difficult for new players attempting to adapt to the Powerful Pro world. The presentation is where it truly shines, with chibi visuals that are charming and attractive, with loving attention paid to every detail. The menus are a joy to navigate, with wonderful sound effects and music, cute background art, rotating and detailed renders of stadium previews, and a plethora of other aesthetic delights that highlight the love Konami's development team brought to this series. Players created in Konami's Game Boy Advance spinoff *Power Pro Kun Pocket 3*, a romantic visual novel with baseball serving more as a plot context than the center of the action, can be copied via password. While newcomers may have challenges solving the complicated pitching controls, excellent baseball mechanics and some of the best visuals and sound on the console should encourage players to hang in there!

Reflections: I don't speak or read Japanese, but I know enough English to pick out the keyword in the title. *Basic-ban* translates to "basic edition," and that's exactly what's offered here. The series' signature Success Mode, an RPG-style baseball experience in which you shepherd created players to NPB glory, is gone. So is the mode in which you can jump into high-leverage game situations for a quick adrenaline pop. The series' engaging formula continues in terms of baseball, audio, and visual quality, so if you play this one in a vacuum, you'll have a good time. But I can't in good conscience recommend this title to anyone who has the chance to play any of the other of this series' appearances on the N64 that are all stocked with a full suite of modes. – JM

Jikkyō World Soccer 3

[Real World Soccer 3]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆☆

Bend it like Hasimoto with up to four players in this digital edition of the beautiful game. Jump into an Open Game for a quick one-off match, begin an International Tournament, start World League and play every team in a 70-game season, or have some fun with penalty kicks. There are 36 international teams, with several All-Star teams to unlock after winning the World League. Once the coin is tossed and field sides are chosen, the gameplay is fast, smooth, and exciting. The view is a wide-angle perspective, and the pitch size perfectly suits the players, making it seem like the action is always close. Controls are crisp and responsive, and shooting and passing the ball are easy and accurate. The computer AI does a great job of anticipating player location and ball trajectory, which maintains the flow of the match. Even in automatic mode, the changing player control on the pitch is fast and rarely leaves the player out of the play. Slide tackles are satisfying when performed correctly. While missing one rarely results in a foul, it will take the player away from the ongoing play. Discovering new control techniques is intuitive and gives an addictive sense of accomplishment. A simple, effective tactic is to lob the ball in front of the goal from the sidelines and try for the header, bicycle kick, or rebound. Beginners and experienced players alike will appreciate the varied yet straightforward controls that allow phenomenal player control. Control modes include fully automatic (CPU determines cursor selection and passing targets), partial auto (player determines cursor selection but CPU determines passing target), and fully manual. The time of day and weather can be adjusted from the Environment Settings menu before kickoff. When playing alone, several modes keep things interesting. Create new players to trade, or try Scenario or Training modes to practice new techniques and situations. Scenario mode provides 16 different conditions of varying difficulty, and Training mode allows a player to practice free kicks, corner kicks, or free play with no opponent.

The menu system can seem complicated, but the main modes are easily accessed. Above-average graphics and exceptionally smooth animations and frame rates make everything look terrific. The menu music is groovy, and the in-game announcers are exuberant and engaged without becoming annoying. The tight controls, smooth gameplay, and fast action make for a fantastic sports title even non-soccer fans might enjoy.

Reflections: I've never been the biggest soccer fan, but after playing *Jikkyō World Soccer 3*, I will definitely be adding it to my arsenal of multiplayer couch co-op games for when friends come over. The intuitive controls and smooth gameplay made it a joy to play. The North American version of this title is *International Superstar Soccer 64*. That edition changed teams, goal celebrations, create-a-player face options, music, and menus. – BC

Jinsei Game 64

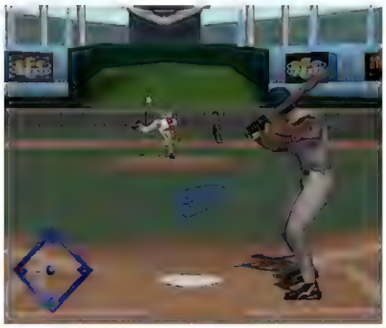
Genre: Board Game
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Takara
Publisher: Takara
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

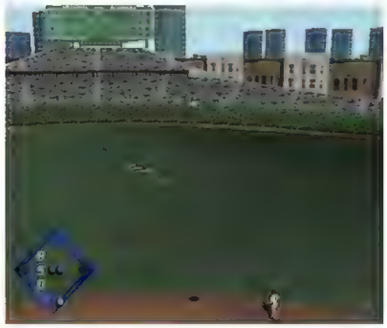
Milton Bradley's *The Game of Life* inspired this virtual, Japanese interpretation of the classic board game. Choose from one to four players, then design the character's physical attributes before beginning. Play begins shortly after birth, transitioning from elementary age to working adults until retirement. Start each turn by spinning the iconic multi-colored number wheel, dictating the number of spaces moved on the board. The family car drives around in a third-person view of the colorful 3D game boards, collecting assets along the way. In the more traditional Exciting Mode, 14 unique spaces await players, ranging from joy (positive attribute added), sadness (negative attribute), heart (romantic event), chance (option for a new job or add a new card), and salary – which includes promotions, among others. These events display as cartoon-animated 2D cutscenes with textboxes, all while fun, upbeat music and sound effects play. These bring a much-needed break from standard gameplay, but it can feel like they drag out turns much longer than necessary. The on-screen menu keeps track of player statistics and status, such as profession (pro wrestler, manga artist, novelist, among many others), club activity, money, game position, etc. The addition of mini-game spaces works well to engage players in short battles for statistic increases, but these are few and far between. Two additional four-player modes are also available. In Pair Mode, team up with another player to raise enough affection points to get married. Tag Mode requires players to collaborate in pairs, combining assets instead of a one-for-all approach. Players can select different game boards to add variety (players can visit outer space, heaven, casinos, etc.) to the basic life-cycle map. While introducing new elements might be enough to interest fans of *The Game of Life* into playing a few games, the over-reliance on luck over skill seems like a missed opportunity to bring this board game to life.

Reflections: I've been playing *The Game of Life* for as long as I can remember, so I was intrigued to discover how a virtual Japanese version would play. I soon realized that two of the expected outcomes of the Western version are either not a given (getting married) or incorporated at all (having children). During my very first playthrough of *Jinsei Game 64*, I finished without finding a mate! This outcome isn't even a possibility in the Western version. I surely thought I had missed something. Like the real world, finding someone you're compatible with and successfully navigating the dating scene is difficult. I just didn't expect a light-hearted virtual board game to smack me in the face with it. – JBr

Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest

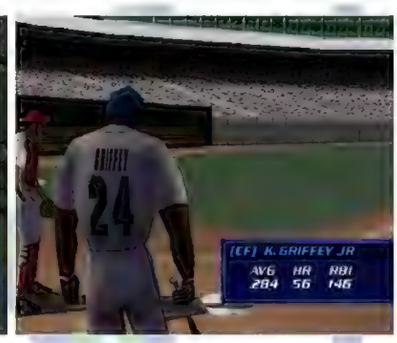
Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Angel Studios
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

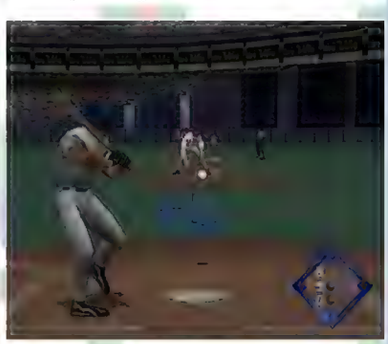




This MLB-licensed baseball title walks the line between a data-heavy simulation and an over-the-top arcade title. After picking teams and stadiums, take the field! The camera sits behind the plate, facing the pitcher. Line up the teardrop-shaped batting target with the square ball destination indicator, swing with A, bunt with B, or advance individual base runners with the C-buttons. (Players can also press R to advance them all!) While fielding, the control automatically switches to the player closest to the ball. A target shows where an airborne ball will land, and arrows point from the player to the ball. Quickly throw to any base with a single C-button (C-right for first, C-up for second, etc.) Pitching in single-player swaps the camera behind the mound; otherwise, it stays behind home plate. There are eight pitches, everything from fastballs to knuckleballs, sliders, and screwballs, but each pitcher only utilizes four. Throw with A, B, or by holding Z and pressing A or B, nudge the ball's trajectory mid-flight with the analog stick, and hold Z and press the C buttons to pick off runners. There are four modes to choose from: Exhibition, Season, World Series, and Home Run Derby. Exhibition lets players pick teams and play a single game. Season and World Series expand this to multiple games and add features like lineup management, drafts, and player injuries. Home Run Derby drops all of this to just swing at pitches. Up to two players compete in Exhibition, and up to four go head-to-head in World Series and Home Run Derby. There are many customization options at players' fingertips, including assisted fielding, four difficulty levels, and the ability to create players with custom stats. The high-resolution graphics hit a home run with their largely realistic design. Player models feature subtle shading to show muscle tone (though faces lack detail), and 30 stadiums around North America include both day and night modes. Plug in an Expansion Pak to up the visuals to super-high resolution mode, which adds even more detail and clarity. Overall, this fast-paced baseball game gives a taste of rocketing the ball across the field to make dramatic outs and the opportunity to manage player stats and the bullpen carefully. Fans of the national pastime will have a great time slugging homers no matter which style they prefer.

Reflections: *Slugfest* is a clear improvement over its well-received predecessor, *Major League Baseball Featuring Ken Griffey Jr.* It adds new stadiums, better animations, up-to-date team rosters, and improved visuals. It also adopts more realistic gameplay elements without sacrificing a casual pick-up-and-play style. The more time you spend learning about player stats and using them, the more you'll enjoy the game. It feels finicky and precise the first time you try it, but when you finally nail a home run, boy, does it feel good. – JBa





Killer Instinct Gold

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Stranded thousands of years in the past, the fighters that battled Ultratech now face off against Eyedol's ancient rival Gargos in this side-view fighter, an arcade port of *Killer Instinct 2*. There are ten characters to choose from, including three newcomers – Maya, Tusk, and Kim Wu – who join series staples Glacius, TJ Combo, Sabrewulf, and more. Six buttons employ low/high quick, medium, and fierce attacks ranging from punches and kicks to weapons like B. Orchid's tonfa. Besides standard standing, crouching, and jumping attacks, these buttons can be combined with D-pad or Control Stick movement to execute special moves or chained in sequences for powerful combos. These combos start with openers like Jago's Windkick or Fulgore's Eye Laser and chain into additional special moves using auto-doublers and linkers that extend the onslaught. Pressing back allows blocking, but built-in counters for most combo types give opponents a way to reverse flow. This gameplay strength is its weakness: reliance on combo mastery means matches often boil down to executing lengthy inputs rather than acting and reacting. A fighter's health bar must be depleted twice to eliminate them. An opponent's health bar flashes red when near death, opening them up to End Finishers that can trigger stage-specific deaths, like falling off Spinal's pirate ship. This edition also introduces the Super Meter, used to perform powerful Super Moves once sufficiently charged. Seven game modes offer serious variety. Arcade is a classic ladder climb to reach and defeat Gargos. Team and Team Elimination offer two variants for battles between rosters of up to 11 fighters. Tournament lets two to eight players hot-seat, tracking wins and losses across matches. Practice, Training, and Focused Training help players hone their skills and unlock character palette swaps, which is critical; even on the easiest settings, the AI offers little respite for an untrained combatant. Options include adjustments to control mapping, time limits, throws, blood, and much more. Dynamic levels that turn and pan the camera with the position of the fighters, Chris Sutherland's iconic combo announcements, and Grant Kirkhope's excellent compositions result in plenty of surface appeal. Still, it doesn't handle quite as smoothly as it looks and sounds. More memorization than memorable, this technical fighting title is solid without being solid gold.

Reflections: Unlike the Super NES port of *Killer Instinct*, little here needed to be changed to work on the hardware. The instruction manual is an invaluable resource, dense with pages of theory, definitions, and move lists. Some inputs are trickier to register than others. I found the quarter circle downs finicky on either the Control Stick or the D-pad, while the quarter circle forward/backs seemed effortless. *Killer Instinct Gold* is less accessible than its predecessor, so unless you plan to battle it out with friends, be sure to learn openers, auto-doubles, linkers, and the priority for different attacks. – DG

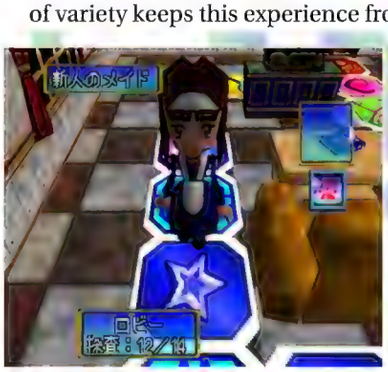
European Cartridge

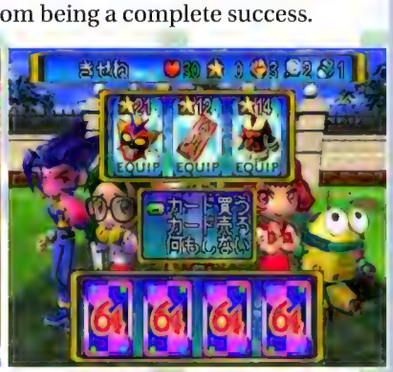
Kiratto Kaiketsu! 64 Tanteidan

[Shining and Solving! 64 Detective Club]
Genre: Board Game
Release Date: Oct. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Pandora Box
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

Combine multiplayer party-game style with traditional board gameplay for this eclectic and unique experience. After selecting one of five characters (from four children and their robot friend) and one of three missions, up to four CPU or human-controlled players participate in a bright cartoon 3D mansion-set board game. Each character has its own attributes, such as stamina, speed, attack, and investigative power. The character's strengths determine the player's strategy, depending on the mission. The three mission choices are played similarly: recovering stolen items, disabling bombs, and finding missing objects. Players begin each turn by rolling dice and watching their 3D chibi character move to the appropriate spaces on the board. All characters are presented in a third-person side view while upbeat music, sound effects, and the occasional voice line play in the background. Where the character lands then determines the action or outcome to play out. Some spots add or deduct points from the total; others increase stamina, add items or equipment cards to a collection, or allow the character to investigate the room according to the selected mission. For example, players can examine the furniture in a room to find missing or stolen items or special item cards. Players may choose another option besides rolling dice to move around the house, such as "action," allowing them to consume points to increase their character attributes. Additionally, they can use their turn to utilize any items or equipment they have accumulated. Players may also engage in battle sequences with an opponent or the mansion's resident guard. Both characters attempt to knock the other out in four turns or less by taking turns using item cards, which can carry out actions or attacks. Other mansion residents can also be interacted with, and their input varies depending on the mission. On the surface, there appears to be enough variety to keep players engaged. Despite the distinctive party/board game hybrid, there is too much redundancy between the missions and overall gameplay, which means all three ultimately feel very similar. Combined with the absence of real action, the lack of variety keeps this experience from being a complete success.

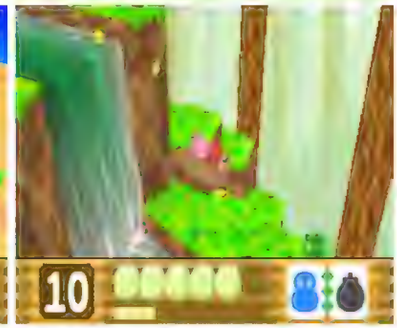
Reflections: Preceding the Mario Party franchise by a couple of months, *Kiratto Kaiketsu! 64 Tanteidan* had the potential to be a leader in the party game genre. However, its overreliance on traditional board game attributes, such as dice rolling for movement and experience gains, and card usage for nearly everything else, keeps the excitement level low. Adding more mini-games or elements that take the player off the board for a while could have made a big difference. Requiring your character to use cards to battle enemies doesn't feel interactive enough for a party game. A deep and complicated ruleset with abundant on-screen menus and prompts makes this title challenging to play without good Japanese knowledge (or a reliable guide). – JBr





Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: June 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



Everyone's favorite cute pink puffball is back to save the fairies' secret treasure from the sinister Dark Matter. Kirby must inhale objects and enemies on a quest to recover all the crystal shards in this 2.5D platformer. There are six planets to visit (starting from Kirby's home planet of Pop Star), each with several stages, before reaching the final planet, Dark Star. A tutorial is available to help explain Kirby's abilities, which include running, floating, inhaling foes, throwing inhaled foes, exhaling enemies/objects, and swallowing specific enemies to access their Special Power. The controls are snappy and intuitive, making it pleasant to control Kirby. The seven Special Powers mimic the inhaled enemy, such as Cutter (boomerang throwing), Ice (ice breath to freeze enemies), or Bomb (tossing a bomb). Learning which enemies provide which Special Power is half the fun. Kirby may use a Special Power by simultaneously swallowing two Special Power enemies, throwing a Special Power enemy into a second, or swallowing a Combo Star (formed from either throwing an inhaled Special Power foe into another or throwing a Power Star from an inhaled enemy into another foe). There are 28 different Power Combos to discover, such as the powerful Burning Cutter (Cutter-Bomb) and the versatile "Swiss Army Kirby" (Needle-Needle). Other interesting combinations can turn Kirby into a figure skater, random animal statues, or even a refrigerator. Enemies and bosses may be weaker or stronger to certain powers, so a little trial and error can go a long way. Specific paths to hidden crystal shards will only be accessible if Kirby has a particular power, so players must do some backtracking to find them all. The stage selection screen allows players to view the remaining crystal shards and revisit any completed stage. In addition to the main story, Mini-Games, Enemy Info, Theater, Sound Check, Boss Battles, and Settings modes are available from the options menu of a save file. Mini-Games like Bumper Crop Bump or 100-Yard Hop are the only way to play multiplayer and can be a nice change of pace for a few minutes, even with CPU opponents. The visuals and graphics are beautiful, with bright colors and smooth animations. Boss battles look particularly spectacular, using the 3D rendered environment to maximize the 2D experience. The music throughout is catchy, if a little repetitive. These proceedings can sometimes feel easy and short, but revisiting levels to find all the crystals stretches out the experience. The variety of forms and attacks the little pink cutie offers will surely please platforming fans.

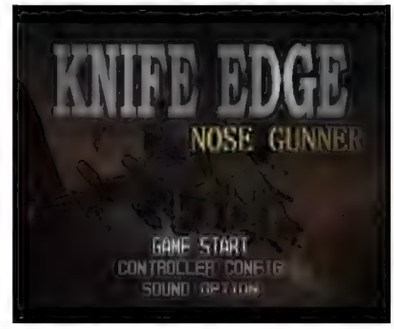
Reflections: Being able to float around as Kirby is a joyous distraction. I have always loved discovering which enemies to swallow and which to avoid. My favorite combination is Cutter and Spark, as it's a fast weapon that doesn't slow you down to use (and it looks like a lightsaber, sweet!). I appreciate that *Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards* went with the 3D rendered world with 2D gameplay – it helps the game flow well with no silly camera angles to wrestle with while allowing for exciting and varied-level design. This game is a little easier than the previous Kirby installments, and I found myself trying to speed-run through the game for the challenge. – BC

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Knife Edge: Nose Gunner

Knife Edge (EU)
Genre: Rail Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Kemco
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆



All-American Michael Samson jumps into the high-tech Knife Edge as the nose gunner for a first-person on-rails shooter across Mars. Should he need a chance to get his bearings, he can hop into Practice mode. Otherwise, in Story mode, it is straight into a frantic firefight through six stages on the alien world, including the desolate ruins of Dead City and the icy palace of Cold Vengeance. His task is to aim and shoot his Vulcan Cannons at opposing alien crafts as the ship rockets through stages at high speed. Mars gives off a very muddy, blocky feel, considering the stage layouts and enemy design, though the music includes a few decent guitar licks to spice things up. The beginning of each mission presents a bevy of path options, but the gameplay differences are negligible. In addition to the Vulcan Cannons, Michael can fire a variety of Special Weapons, which can be readily switched to depending on the situation, including Homing Missiles, Plasma Tornadoes, Nukes, Flak, and a Laser. Shooting down 30 enemies charges up a Special Bomb that destroys all bogies on screen, but while three Special Bombs can be stored at once, it seems rare to even encounter enough enemies to earn one. Because everything is happening briskly, the Knife Edge can take stray shots constantly or get blindsided by an obstacle that depletes a large amount of its shield. Michael can make minor thruster shifts using the C-buttons, but such actions can send him straight into more enemy fire rather than lead him out of danger. Once the Knife Edge shield drops to 0%, it is a critical mission failure. Thankfully, destroyed aliens sometimes leave shield heals or Vulcan Cannon power upgrades, but they are rare. Boss fights are encountered midway through some stages and at the end of all. The giant enemy appears as a random assortment of polygons stacked into vaguely threatening shapes, like the fish boss of Amethyst Ravine or the tank hovering over lava partway through Crimson Lake. They fire projectiles in easy-to-predict patterns with glowing weak spots to know where to direct shots. Up to four players can squad up to either take down the story or compete for points, each person having a crosshair with a unique color and shape. Unfortunately, even multiplayer does not rise to a level of fun worth the effort of gathering friends. Leave the copilots out of it, and consider staying grounded to avoid more bog-standard, blocky, boring shooting mechanics.

Reflections: Fans of light-gun shooters might easily be tricked into thinking *Knife Edge: Nose Gunner* is the N64 game they've been waiting for, but sadly, no. The N64 never got a light gun, but it's worth noting that Naki International (also known as Nakitek) had tried to create one in 1997. Dubbed the Lunar Gun, it could be augmented with a laser targeting attachment and looked an awful lot like Fox McCloud's blaster. They released the light gun on the PlayStation, but no software on the N64 supported its full development. In the end, we were left without. – CPr

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Knockout Kings 2000

Box Champions 2000 (GER)
Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Black Ops Entertainment
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆

Step into the ring and play as some of the greatest names in boxing with an impressive roster of 25 historical fighters, including Muhammad Ali, Roberto Duran, and Oscar De La Hoya, along with nine boxing venues across three basic modes. To add more fighters, Create Boxer mode allows a contender to be constructed, from his appearance to his signature moves. Quick Start throws a player into a simple match with two boxers, while Slugfest lets a player take on a friend or a CPU opponent. The fighters, venue, difficulty, number of rounds, and even knockdown frequency are selectable. The long-term Career mode has a selected pugilist training and battling his way to the top of his weight class, one bout at a time. The default camera sits slightly above the ring and rotates with the fight to keep player one on the left. The analog stick moves the boxer, and a lead hand punch is thrown with the B button and a dominant hand punch with A, while combining with the Control Stick Up/Down will throw an uppercut and body blow, respectively. Holding Z while pressing a direction will enable blocking, ducking, and weaving around punches. Holding the R trigger puts more power into punches, and the C-buttons execute quick combos, taunts, or signature punches if timed correctly, but at the cost of a bit of stamina. Every connected hit fills a meter that, when maxed out, unlocks a Super-Charged Punch that, if landed, will result in an instant knockdown. The control scheme may seem advanced initially, but players may not need to master all of it. Fights against the CPU, regardless of difficulty or weight class, can be won by spamming body shots until the opponent drops. Matches with friends may likely devolve into bouts where both will throw punches with abandon until someone is KO'd. Boxers look accurate compared to their real-life counterparts, and they get cuts and bruises as they fight, which is a nice and realistic touch. Bouts are introduced through "tales of the tape" (on-screen fighter stats) to lively crowds and camera flashes, and Al Albert and Sean O'Grady are there for commentary, albeit extremely sparse, while referee Mills Lane is there for the counts. However, once the bell rings, easy and reliable exploits disincentivize playing to each fighter's unique strengths and styles. There are enough tools to allow players to think and react like one of the featured big-name boxers, but no good reason to do so. The in-ring action here doesn't quite make the weight cut.

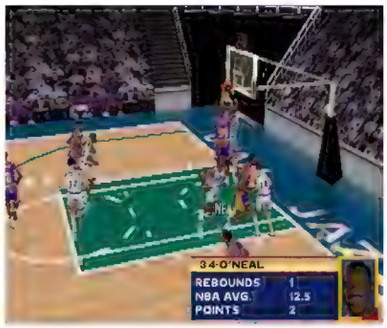
Reflections: I beat the *Knockout Kings 2000* career mode with Joe Frazier in about an hour, winning every fight the same way: button spamming. Ultimately, the road to the heavyweight championship was more of a chore than a challenge. *Knockout Kings 2000* has decent graphics and the controls of a good boxing game, but the AI and modes are too simplistic to keep you engaged. It's a bummer, especially considering the PlayStation received a more extensive and detailed version of the game. Worse is that N64 players didn't get to see if things could improve with a sequel, as this was the franchise's only entry for the console. – NT

European Cartridge

German Cartridge
Box Champions 2000

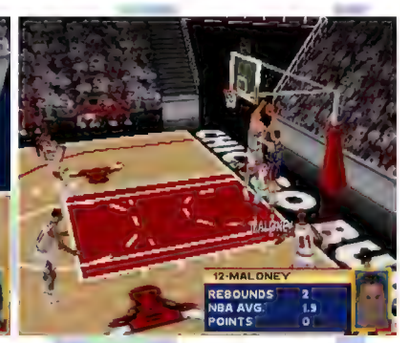
Kobe Bryant in NBA Courtside

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Left Field Productions
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆



Step onto the hardwood with this NBA basketball simulation with robust gameplay features, a horizontal television camera perspective, and presentation elements like replays to make it feel like a professional basketball event. Although Lakers' all-star guard Kobe Bryant is the cover athlete (the 1997-98 NBA roster is featured), the actual leap in the gameplay comes from more advanced offensive and defensive gameplay mechanics. To help score more baskets, players use passing icons by using the R and Z buttons, allowing them to dish to specific players. Players can protect their dribble, pivot, and even pump fake before putting up a shot. The C buttons can be used for spin dribbles, setting up an alley-oop, setting a pick, switching dribbling hands, or crossing a defender over. Play in the post is possible, with big men like Shaquille O'Neal and Karl Malone backing down players in the post by pressing R in combination with the analog stick before attempting a scoring move. Besides standard defensive plays like stealing, blocking shots, and rebounding, defenders can backpedal, box out, or even commit an intentional foul. Using the R button will put the controlled player into a defensive stance, blocking a player's path to the hoop or increasing the defender's chance of getting a steal. The difficulty is well-balanced, and player attributes matter for most things – sharpshooter Reggie Miller will shoot 3-pointers better than a lumbering defensive player like Dennis Rodman. Only occasionally is the illusion of reality broken, like seeing the computer-controlled power forwards and centers use spin dribble moves. A source of disappointment is in the meager three game modes: the single-game match-up Pre-season, a Season mode with a variable game amount and stat tracking, and a Playoff tournament. Custom players can be created, and their dozen attributes tweaked, like height, shooting ability, dunking, and more. Trades are available through a Roster screen but do not have to be balanced. There is no franchise mode, NBA draft, or salary cap to worry about that would make player management enjoyable. The music is a generic sort of groove, and the announcing features a slew of repeats, but thankfully, both can be muted. A better aspect of the presentation is the instant replays and close-up camera for dunks and other plays at the rim. This fun, reality-based hoops game, with aspects like the post-up play, defensive stance, and dribble moves, feels like an accurate representation of the pro game instead of playground pick-up.

Reflections: A friend of mine had *NBA Courtside* back in the day, and few things matched his anger as when I got incredibly lucky using a last-minute, halfcourt, 3-point shot to beat his Lakers as the Celtics. That alone is a reason for me to remember it fondly. Still, beyond that, this is one of the first games that even attempted to accurately include staples of fundamental basketball, like post-play and defensive stances. While it sold well at the time, the release of *NBA2K* on the Dreamcast about a year later was a much more polished and thorough game that stuck with gamers as the Madden series did for football, and Left Field Productions only made two follow-ups to this one. – SG



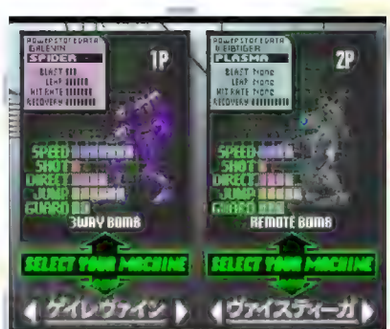
European Cartridge

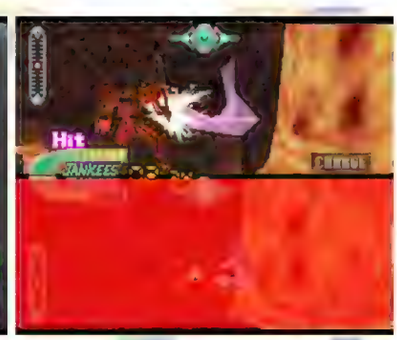
Last Legion UX

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: May 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Yuke's
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

Go back in time and battle in powerful mech suits known as Legions to win a war before it even begins. This third-person arena fighter offers a story mode, one-player CPU battles, and two-player split-screen bouts. There are eight Legions to choose from (with more available to unlock), each with different stats in speed, shooting, direct/close combat, jumping, and defense. Most can equip various guns, melee weapons, and shields. They all come with specific secondary weapons, usually an explosive or projectile, and a unique power stone – exposed cores that power the suits and can unleash special abilities or attacks. In battles, Legions drop into fully 3D arena maps that vary in size, terrain, verticality, and environment. The gameplay moves at a slow, deliberate pace, which gives ample time to read and react to the action, but some sluggish animations, spotty hit detection, and controls that can feel a bit awkward at times bog it down. Legions can glide with a strafe in any direction, double jump with thrusters, guard, and go on the offensive with projectile, melee, and special attacks. However, combat seems heavily catered toward firearms and can make battles against CPU opponents pretty trivial, even on the highest difficulty. Getting a high-firing gun, locking on, keeping a good bit of space, then coasting to an easy victory is likely as the opposition's health chips away. That said, getting up close with a kick, punch, or sword strike is not entirely without merit. When a hit connects, time slows, the camera cuts in, and sparks fly as the struck Legion launches back with a chunk of its health taken away. It is incredibly satisfying, even more so when it happens after ripping out the other Legion's power stone. The move is much harder to pull off, but it is a one-hit kill that brings fights to an abrupt and devastating end. The Legions are colorful in their design but not particularly memorable, and while the stages have some decent backdrops, they do not stand out much either. Story mode is only available with some Legions, but completing it with each one awards new weapons and a couple of extra stages and mechs to try out. The time-traveling narrative is just paper-thin reasoning to fight the roster, so repeat playthroughs get old fast. Unfortunately, the rest of the experience does too.

Reflections: If I remember anything about *Last Legion UX*, it'll be the impact it conveys whenever a melee strike connects. Seeing time slow down to signal that I landed a blow or nailed the instant kill never failed to get a reaction out of me. It was a saving grace for me in an otherwise mediocre game. There were a lot of unintended jumps, too. You have to hit A and B together for a melee attack, and quite often, I would hit B just a split second too soon. So instead of hitting the Legion right before me, I'd be 100 feet in the air. If you ask me, some of the inputs could've been a bit cleaner. – NT

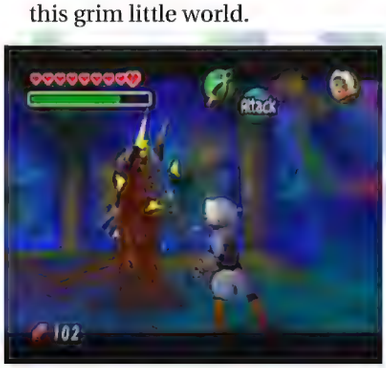




The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Oct. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (required)
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Link sets off on a personal quest after saving Hyrule in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. His journey is interrupted by the Skull Kid, a meddlesome imp using the power of Majora's Mask to smash the moon into Termina. Link has only three days to power up, scale the Clock Tower, and defeat the Skull Kid. Control Link from a fixed-camera third-person perspective, occasionally swapping to a first-person view to fire certain weapons. Link can roll, swing his sword, and utilize over two dozen items and upgrades, including bows and arrows, bottles, and bombs. Link can also wear 24 masks, most of which impart simple abilities, like the Bunny Hood increasing movement speed. Four special masks transform Link into creatures whose abilities replace his own. The Deku Mask, for example, turns him into a Deku Scrub that can fire bubbles, spin, and launch out of Deku Flowers. Link employs masks to complete quests, solve puzzles, and deal with enemies. Foes like the wobbly Chuchu are vulnerable to nearly any attack, but zombie-like ReDeads are best handled by wearing a mask that makes them ignore Link. Having just three days until the world ends is pretty stressful. Fortunately, Link has the Song of Time, allowing him to rewind to day one at any moment. Link goes back and forth between the village and the field, manipulating the days as he clears dungeons and gains new items. Even with this song, though, time is not on anyone's side, as many events are only available on certain days or hours. If Link wanders too far, he can miss an experience, which makes standing in one spot waiting for something to happen a better (but boring) alternative. The 3D visuals aim to unsettle with scenery and characters that are downright demented (look at that moon!), and the music echoes this with somber tunes that only occasionally turn upbeat. The mask mechanic is truly unique and definitely a highlight. It is a lot of fun utilizing full-transformation masks to make certain obstacles a cakewalk, but hunting down non-essential masks and playing with their powers is also fun. The only cumbersome part is the time mechanic, but after a few hours, it seems like just another facet of this grim little world.



Reflections: *Majora's Mask* receives some raised eyebrows for being a follow-up to *Ocarina of Time*, which lacks epic adventures and sprawling landscapes. Both games share the same control style and engine (masks were also in *Ocarina of Time*, albeit in a limited form). However, *Majora's Mask* isn't about rescuing princesses or defeating Ganon: it's an intimate tale in a doomed world that looks like something out of a child's fever dream. Those horrors here are genuinely unsettling, too, which tends to turn people away. Sit down with the game for just a few hours, though, and you'll realize the dark setting, the always-ticking clock, and the restricted world create an amazing atmosphere of fear and dread that permeates the entirety of the design. This atmosphere isn't very "Zelda," but it's still very, very good. – JBa

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Collectors Edition" Cartridge with Lenticular Label

Australian Cartridge

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Can Hyrule's destiny depend on such a lazy boy? Link must prove himself in the fifth installment in The Legend of Zelda series, the first to cross into 3D. Control Link as he explores a huge fantasy-themed world from a third-person perspective with a sword, shield, and more than a dozen other items. The evil Ganondorf is trying to obtain the Triforce, a relic that would grant him immeasurable power, and only Link can stop him. With the hint-giving (sometimes nagging) fairy Navi floating nearby, he ventures across forests and mountains, through flooded caverns, and deep into puzzle-filled dungeons (each ending in an epic boss battle), all while gathering items and equipment that help him to defeat Ganondorf. The wide-open Hyrule Field connects to most locations, serving as a convenient hub. Move with the analog stick, hold the shield out with R, and use items with C-left, C-right, and C-down. The A button is context-sensitive and lets Link roll, climb small ledges, talk to NPCs, and more, while the B button performs sword slashes. When an enemy appears, use Z to lock onto it. This action centers the camera on the target and allows him to use special evasive and attacking techniques like the sidestep or jump slash. Enemies come in various forms, from big spiders that drop from the ceiling to the bat-like Keese and skeleton knights called Stalfos. Link can defeat many enemies with direct sword attacks, but others require item usage and clever strategies. Hitting Torch Slugs with a hammer to flip them on their backs, for example, makes them vulnerable to other weapons, or tricking armored Dodongos into swallowing bombs destroys them. Link finds plenty of new equipment throughout the journey, including better shields, upgraded tunics, potion bottles, and boots that let him hover or sink into the water. And, of course, the Ocarina is a musical instrument that plays songs learned throughout the adventure. These songs can change the time of day, summon Link's trusty horse Epona, warp him to temples instantly, and even reveal hidden paths forward.

After completing a handful of smaller dungeons and working through about half of the story, Link accesses the Temple of Time and pulls the Master Sword from its pedestal, triggering a time jump into a future where Ganondorf rules the land. Hyrule is a dark place now, with new (and depressing) sights to see and more formidable enemies to defeat. Link has also changed, as he is now grown up and can use items his younger self could not, like the Hookshot or bow and arrows. Similarly, there are items he could use before that he no longer can, like Deku Sticks and the slingshot. He can now freely travel back and forth between time periods, too, which is necessary to gather additional items, complete quests, and open the path to Ganondorf. Despite having a linear story, the journey has a smooth and organic progression from beginning to end. Between saving Gorons from starvation and freeing the Sages, Link stumbles across many optional quests, including gathering Gold Skulltula tokens and finding heart pieces to increase his maximum life. There are even mini-games to indulge in, like a shooting gallery or the Heart-Pounding Gravedigging Tour. These extras help to incentivize exploration and reward players who want to do more than battle Ganondorf. The music is breathtaking, and the visuals perfectly capture the world of Hyrule as the sun rises and sets in smooth day-night cycles. With the addition of simple but well-tuned combat, delicately balanced puzzle difficulty, and memorable boss battles, the result is an experience that is just about perfect.

Reflections: Decades after its release, the echoes of *Ocarina of Time*'s influence can still be seen throughout the gaming world. Take off the rose-tinted glasses and approach *Ocarina* with a fresh perspective; you'll still be drawn into its story, enchanted by its inhabitants, perplexed (but not frustrated) by its puzzles, and addicted to exploring its world. There were no similar games to draw inspiration from and no formula to translate an adventure game from 2D to 3D. Instead, *Ocarina of Time* steps back and focuses on our experience. It keeps us hooked, not by sticking the narrative on rails, but by stocking the world with interesting things to see and collect, letting us explore and enjoy as we desire, all while providing enough structure to still have goals and rewards to look forward to. Many years later, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* is still hailed as a masterpiece and one of the greatest video games of all time. – JBa

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Collectors Edition" Gold Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

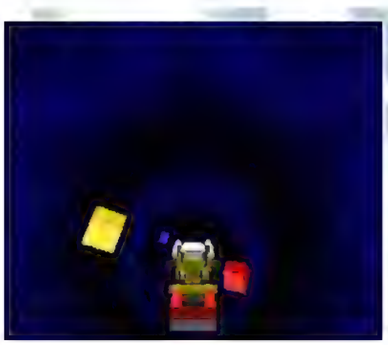
LEGO Racers

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: High Voltage Software
Publisher: LEGO Media International
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

This LEGO-inspired kart racer is a fun and colorful time for kids of all ages. Start a Single Race, compete in the Circuit Race to unlock new tracks and building pieces, battle it out in a Versus Race with a friend (or one of the kids), or beat their best effort in a Time Race. Third-person driving is easy, but remaining consistently at the head of the pack requires some well-timed power slides around tight corners. If a racer is still lagging, they can collect power-ups to gain the upper hand. Each power-up can be upgraded three times by collecting enough white blocks, but sometimes it may be more beneficial to use the current one instead of waiting to collect more for a specific upgrade. Red blocks are forward-firing weapons (Cannon Ball, Grappling Hook, Lightning Wand, Guided Rockets), green blocks are turbo boosts, yellow blocks are rear attacks (Oil Slick, Barrel of Gun Powder, Magnetic Trap, Mummy's Curse), and blue blocks are defensive shields. There are seven racing circuits but only 13 tracks, so some of the circuit races can get a little repetitive. The tracks are well designed and varied with their own unique theme, and the presentation style is very fun and colorful, with lots of great LEGO detail. If so inclined, building a custom driver and car is a great way to personalize the experience, and it is fun to do! When building, players can push the MIX button to randomize the driver, or they can go through every building option and make the driver of their LEGO dreams. Building a car, however, can be a little more involved. Players must select the chassis type before building the rest of the car by dropping blocks onto it. Hundreds of different blocks can be mixed and matched as long as there is room to put them down on the chassis or another block. However, remember that different chassis and build types will affect how the car handles, so symmetry and weight distribution of blocks are essential. Once a car is built, players can try it out on the test track and modify it as needed before racing. On the track, the frame rate is generally a little low but does not detract from the overall fun experience. The sound and music are above average and complement the intended atmosphere of each stage. Although it may not have many different tracks available, building a new driver and kart keeps everything fresh and quirky for hours of LEGO amusement.

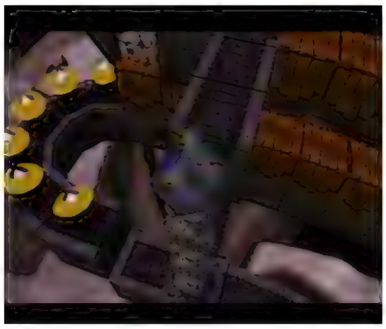
Reflections: LEGO racing fun without the risk of a crippling foot injury! I had never played this game as a kid, but I really enjoyed taking my time to design my car, which is incidentally something I did as a child with real LEGO blocks. Another thing I used to do was to race my car on a track I made on the floor with books, binders, rulers, and whatever else I could find around the house. I wish a track editor had been included, as that would have increased the replay value immensely. – BC

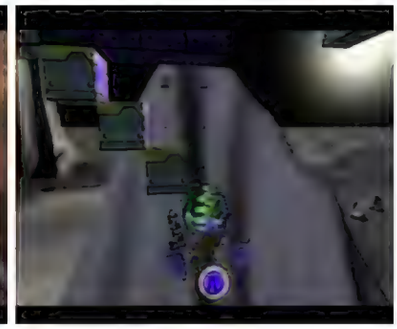
European Cartridge



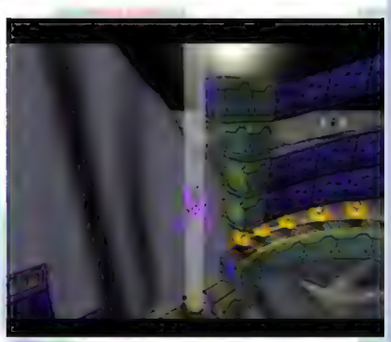
Lode Runner 3-D

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Big Bang Software
Publisher: GT Interactive Software (NA), Banpresto (JP), Infogrames (PAL)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

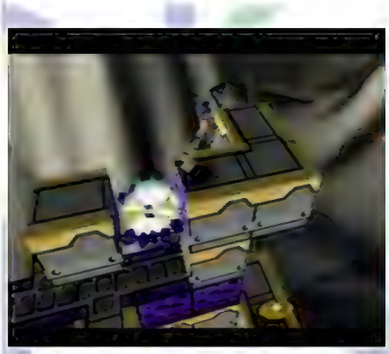




That evil gold digger Emperor Monk has stolen a civilization's gold! In this third-person puzzle platformer, the player will run, destroy blocks with their blaster, and use an array of world-specific transportation items to recover the gold and save those people. Each of the five worlds accessed by the hub has five areas with four levels (plus a hidden bonus world accessed by collecting a gem). The goal is to collect enough gold to unlock the next area and eventually defeat the Monks. To do this, the player moves through levels along pathways made of blocks, some destructible and some solid. The player cannot jump, climb, or shoot enemies directly. Instead, they must trick enemies into walking onto an area that can be blasted out from under them or into one of the level's assorted traps, like the holes they have created, drills, or rolling boulders. Destroyed blocks will regenerate a set amount of time after being destroyed, which will be useful for trapping and destroying enemies in pursuit. Blasting a block will also knock the player back a square, so they must be careful not to do so when an enemy is too close or it risks death. Once enough gold has been recovered, the player can head for the exit and move on to the next level. Each new stage adds challenges and interactive items that increase the complexity of the strategy required to get through the quest, such as ice lifts, steam lifts, and shuttle disks. The music is nice and ambient and fades into the background, not distracting from the required intense planning and thinking. The puzzles are well-thought-out and suited to the 3D environment. Deaths rarely feel cheap or unearned. Players looking to blast out some hidden gold on the system should give this one a look rather than be puzzled that they missed it!



Reflections: The Lode Runner series dates back to the home computers of the early to mid-1980s. The original 1983 title made its way onto many computer platforms and included a level editor, which added to its popularity and longevity. Nearly forty games have been released in the series, both originals and remakes, with many Japanese exclusives – a testament to the formula's longevity. Action-puzzlers like this don't come around every day, and despite my fervent belief that I won't have fun, I inevitably end up sinking a ton of time into them. *Lode Runner 3-D*'s story is rather flimsy, but it could have been about stopping sentient robot vacuum cleaners. I still would have gotten a fantastic amount of enjoyment out of it. – CW



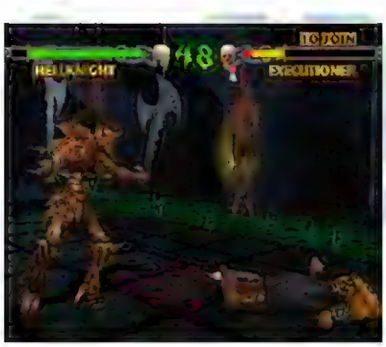
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

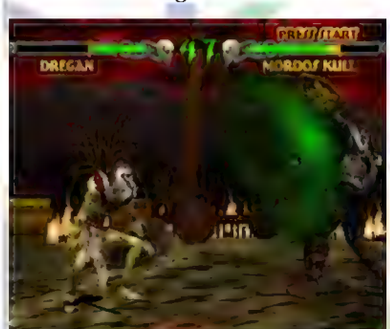
Mace: The Dark Age

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Midway Home Entertainment
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

The Mace of Tanis offers its wielder unbelievable power. Asmodeus, its current owner, will have his many hands full as warriors from kingdoms near and far rush to kill him and take the Mace's power for themselves. This battle for the Mace is a perfect setup for a violent, 3D horizontal-view best-of-three-rounds fighting game with a strong focus on bloody weapon combat. Each of the more than one dozen characters has a repertoire of attacks, combos, special moves, and gory Executions. These fighters are either beefy powerhouses like the axe-wielding Executioner, quick attackers like Namira, the scimitar-swinging dancer, or some combination like Xiao Long, a blind, pole-using monk. The graphics are the big standout here, with vibrant characters and lush environments that offer minor interactivity, such as damaging pools of liquid or pots that can be tossed at opponents. However, the actual gameplay is clunky. The D-pad or the Control Stick is used to move, jump, and crouch, while BACK blocks. Quick attacks, strong attacks, and kicks are available (with jumping and crouching versions for each). A side-step evasion can move players around the 3D space, but it mostly seems to help only the CPU. Special attacks are relatively simple to pull off using directional inputs followed by an attack button, assuming the sluggish controls don't hinder players' ability. For example, Takeshi the samurai has a Flipping Uppercut performed with BACK, DOWN, FORWARD, and strong attack. Some attacks are effective, like Al Rashid's spinning blade Sand Devil technique, but his Blade Tornado special is far too slow and offers little reward, mostly leaving him open for punishment. While attack combos exist, inputs feel delayed. Players may rely heavily on simple attacks and cheese their way to victory, assuming the computer opponents don't anticipate the movements and harshly retaliate. Although the characters and lore are interesting, and each Execution is appropriately over-the-top, that interest wears off very quickly, leaving a good-looking fighter without much gameplay polish, ending with more frustration than satisfaction.



Reflections: As a kid, I thought Lord Deimos, the character on the front of the box of Mace: The Dark Age, was Lord Zedd from *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. I was always disappointed that it wasn't *actually* Lord Zedd. The characters we do have, while not from any Power Rangers canon, are fun to learn about and see in action. It's just that they don't feel good to control. Even though the developers originally started with 30 characters and whittled them down to the final roster through focus testing, they ultimately lack *Soul*. They lack (*Soul*) *Edge*. They lack a certain (*Soul*) *Calibur*. The fact that fighting game fans haven't picked this title up and mined it for all its worth speaks volumes about how shallow it really is. Leave this one in the Dark Age. – CPr



European Cartridge

Madden Football 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tiburon Entertainment
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

The acclaimed football franchise's N64 debut fully uses 3D player models to bump up authenticity and realism. Multiple modes are available from the start, including Season, which lets players tackle the full 1997-98 schedule. Custom Seasons allows divisions to be realigned (even with historical teams), and a Fantasy Draft can be run with up to eight friends. After choosing the mode and team, it's time to hit the gridiron. Each offensive play begins with a press of the A button to snap the ball. The camera starts behind the quarterback but tracks the ball as it moves around the field. Using a comprehensive playbook of real-life plays and formations, players will try to run and pass the ball against defenses that force them to read and react quickly. When playing defense, the A button cycles through players as the squad fights to stop the offense and regain control of the ball by tackling ball carriers, forcing fumbles, or intercepting. Motion-captured animations make game action feel more fluid and responsive, with linemen engaging at the line of scrimmage and the ball visibly spiraling out of the quarterback's hand. Momentum carrying a receiver after making a catch in stride can practically be felt. For an extra jolt of immersion, the Rumble Pak can be utilized to "feel" the action, like when a defender connects on a big hit. Highly detailed stadiums, dynamic weather (be it snow in Lambeau Field or thinner air at Mile High), contextual crowd noise and chants, and commentary from Pat Summerall and John Madden boost game presentation. The 3D models are detailed enough that individual names and numbers are visible on each player's uniform. The game does boast NFLPA-licensed rosters for the '97-'98 season, but it lacks an official NFL team and logo license, so they are absent. That is a big minus, but it does not prevent this football outing from being a very solid experience.

Reflections: *Madden Football 64* is a game a football fan can easily pour hours into playing. Moving around the field is fluid and satisfying. Signing, trading, and releasing players in Season Mode or completely reconstructing teams in the Fantasy Draft turns you into the ultimate armchair GM, which adds lasting appeal. However, this game's real impact is as a foundation for the games to follow. *Madden Football 64* was the first to transition into 3D fully, opening up new gameplay and presentation opportunities that weren't possible before. The game didn't squander those opportunities, and the franchise has thrived for decades since. – NT

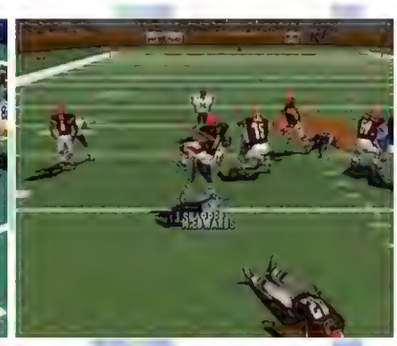
European Cartridge

Madden NFL 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: EA Tiburon
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

The third installment in the N64 football franchise is the second game to carry the full NFL team and player license. The title splits gameplay into two styles: the realistic Traditional and the simplified but dramatic Arcade. In both styles, the camera sits behind and above the ball carrier and tracks the action as it marches up the field. In Traditional, players are given full access to teams' offensive playbooks and can use a variety of blitzes, zones, and man-to-man coverage options on defense. For the first time, an individual receiver's route can be adjusted with just a couple of button presses before the snap with the "hot route" feature. Arcade simplifies team playbooks and emphasizes big runs, highlight-reel catches, and monster hits, with exaggerated animations with ball carriers flying in the air or being slammed into the ground on tackles. Players will enjoy fluid and satisfying on-field gameplay regardless of style or mode. Quarterbacks can fire off bullet passes or lobs down the field that receivers catch in stride, and running backs can make quick, decisive cuts to create space and fight forward for that one extra yard when being tackled. Defenders realistically try to wrap their arms around the ball carrier to take them down and sometimes can even knock their helmet off when colliding at full speed. Play across the board carries a natural-feeling sense of momentum, boosted by 3D player models scaled to match their real-world counterparts' height and weight, though linemen end up looking more like giant bricks in uniforms than people. Complementing the Traditional on-field action is commentary from John Madden and Pat Summerall. In Arcade, though, Andrew Anthony, the voice behind the "E-A Sports: It's in the game" tagline, makes bombastic calls worth hearing at least once. Both styles of play are available for a single-game Exhibition, a multi-game Tournament, or leading a team to the Super Bowl in Season and Franchise modes, which support up to eight players. The Madden Challenge offers a series of on-field objectives that hand out points to unlock secret teams, stadiums, and gameplay modifiers. It's a nice way of encouraging players in different ways and with other teams. It is worth noting that the Fantasy Draft included in previous iterations is inexplicably missing from this version. However, that omission isn't enough to detract from a great game of football that any fan can enjoy, from the fairweather to the biggest diehard.

Reflections: *Madden Football 64* brought the series into 3D, and *Madden NFL 99* introduced Franchise mode, which became its major cornerstone, and custom plays and playbooks. By comparison, *Madden NFL 2000* doesn't have that major game-changing shift or addition. Instead, it took nearly everything built so far and refined it. Multiple users for Franchise mode was a smart addition that allowed running a league with friends. Arcade gameplay made for a quicker and more accessible way to get into Madden, and hot routes gave you another useful tool at the line to solve defenses. This title wasn't a massive leap forward like the last two games, but it touched up the finer details to bring the series closer to the feel of NFL football, which was more than enough in many ways. – NT

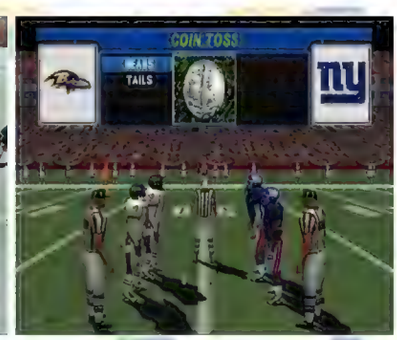


Madden NFL 2001

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: EA Tiburon
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

The football franchise's fourth entry on the N64 is its most detailed and expansive offering yet. Pick from one of the NFL's 31 teams and take the field using the strategies and playbooks from each of the clubs' real-life head coaches. With the camera positioned behind the quarterback and looking downfield, players will experience fluid and authentic gameplay to move the chains on offense or lock down the field on defense. Quarterbacks can rifle pinpoint bullet passes through traffic or toss high-flying lobs downfield with the hold or tap of a button. Running backs can make quick and agile jukes, spins, and hurdles to break free and fight for yards, and receivers will try to get open, catch the ball in stride, or extend to pull in tough catches. Defenders, meanwhile, will realistically wrap their arms around the ball carrier to bring them down, battle with linemen to get to the quarterback, or try to get their hands in the way to break up passes. On both sides of the ball, especially when a game plan is working, everything feels fair and satisfying, boosted by natural-feeling movement and momentum. Teams and players also perform similarly to real-life counterparts thanks to the aforementioned coaching strategies and a rating system that makes everyone on the field feel like a pro, but the stars are a cut above. All players and stars are scaled to their actual heights and weights, and their 3D models are more detailed than ever with specific accessories like receiver gloves, turf tape, and visors. Each stadium is faithfully recreated, and Fox Sports host James Brown sets the stage for each game before handing commentary off to John Madden and Pat Summerall to capture the feel of an NFL Sunday. The gameplay and presentation carry across a wealth of modes, too, be it a single-game Exhibition, a Season with modifiable divisions, a Custom League or Tournament with friends, or the multi-year Franchise where every facet of a selected team's roster is controllable. Players can also hone their skills with Practice mode, master any scenario in Situation mode, or hop into the party-oriented Two-Minute Drill to see who can run the most efficient offense. But no matter how anyone chooses to play, this is an excellent time thanks to tons of variety, boosted presentation and attention to detail, and EA's most enjoyable and authentic game of football yet.

Reflections: This is where Madden hit its peak on N64. After three games, the foundation of what the series could be on the console was pretty set. *Madden NFL 2001* came in with the finishing touches, bringing a couple of extra modes and a series of intelligent refinements and improvements to the game, with the biggest being the addition of the real coaches' playbooks. It all resulted in another successful step toward capturing the spirit of NFL Sundays down to its finest details. With the N64 in its twilight, one more Madden game was on the way, but this one was the franchise's title run. – NT

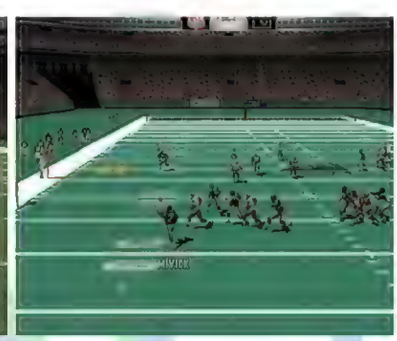


Madden NFL 2002

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 2001
Region: NA
Developer: Budcat Creations, EA Tiburon
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

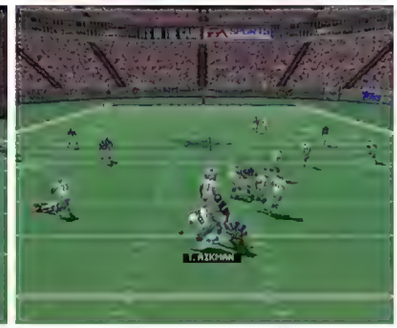
The N64's fifth and final edition of the annual football franchise includes the expansion Houston Texans and updated rosters for the 2001-02 season. Select a team and then use the offensive playbook of that NFL team's actual coach to push the ball downfield, all while trying to keep the opposition locked down on defense. The on-field product is nearly identical to the year before. However, that is a blessing as the controls feel snappy and responsive. Quarterbacks can lob passes over to receivers with a tap of a button or fire bullets at them if holding down the button corresponding to that player. Running backs can cut, spin, and juke with a realistic sense of momentum, and likewise, receivers feel like they get carried forward when they make a catch in stride. CPU-controlled defenses do well trying to cover the field and apply pressure. Players can do the same when trying to get the ball back with tacklers that realistically wrap their arms around targets to contain a play or deliver bone-jarring hits at top-end speed. Games feel fluid and authentic across the board and look the part too. Players are scaled to their real-life heights and weights and come complete with personalized equipment touches like gloves, wristbands, turf tape, and visors. James Brown introduces every game before handing commentary off to Pat Summerall and John Madden, which helps sell the presentation of an actual NFL broadcast, along with instant replays and panning shots of massive 3D stadiums. They're just not the authentic NFL stadiums, though, which are inexplicably missing from the previous years' games and replaced with a handful of generic venues with on-field graphics to match the home team. Players can hit the gridiron alone or with friends in the returning Exhibition, Season, Franchise, Tournament, Custom League, Situation, 2 Minute Drill modes, or hone their skills in a free Team Practice or Training Mode, which breaks down every play and formation in the game. For nostalgia, Madden Classic offers a quick game within a touched-up version of *John Madden Football '93* using updated rosters. So whether a fan is looking for a short trip down memory lane, to build the NFL's next dynasty, hop into a quick match or two with friends, or learn more about the ins and outs of the game, there is a complete and extensive gridiron experience here.

Reflections: The N64 was near the end of its life in late 2001, and this entry ultimately reflects that. It's an incredibly well-rounded package (minus the generic stadiums) built on a foundation that developed through five years and saw the franchise become the football juggernaut we know today. From the jump to 3D and steadily improving graphics to the addition of Franchise, hot routes, and then the real coaches' playbooks, *Madden NFL 2002* has it all contained in one cartridge, plus a nice nod to the past for good measure. A new console generation was underway by the time *Madden NFL 2002* launched. So, while its N64 version was another solid entry, it wasn't out there to push the series forward anymore. It was there to line up in victory formation and run out the clock. – NT



Madden NFL 99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: EA Tiburon
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



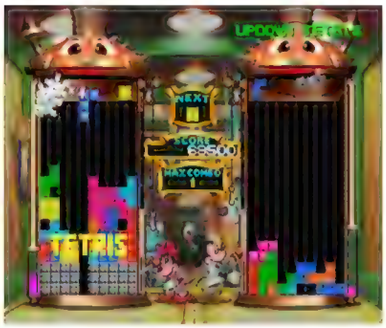
The second installment of the Madden football series on the N64 is the first to boast the full NFL license. Gone are the generic teams from Madden Football 64, replaced with official names, logos, uniforms, stadiums, and updated NFLPA rosters for the 1998-99 season. The gameplay experience can be customized with several options, including Traditional, which mimics the feel of NFL football, and Arcade, which prioritizes big plays and even bigger hits. The perspective starts each play with the camera behind the quarterback. Offensive play selections consist of a variety of real-life run-and-pass plays. Games are often fast-paced, with each play lasting only a few seconds as teams try to march the ball to the end zone to score via a touchdown or field goal. Hundreds of motion-captured moves help on-field proceedings look fluid and natural. Ball carriers fight to regain their balance or keep their momentum moving forward when hit. They can stiff-arm, juke, spin, and hurdle via the C-buttons and Z. After choosing a defensive alignment/play before each snap, defenders can wrap their arms around ball handlers to securely bring them down (or throw them to the ground if in Arcade mode). A practice mode to fine-tune play skills joins Exhibition, Season, Tournament, Custom Season, and Fantasy Draft. The multi-year Franchise tasks players to forge a team into the NFL's next dynasty through trades, free agency, and four draft rounds. Custom playbooks and even custom plays can be created and saved on a handy Controller Pak. However, one Franchise save alone can take up the memory of one. While the gameplay is solid, the presentation lacks some nicer presentation features that make playing more exciting. John Madden and Pat Summerall's commentary is limited to a few rarely spoken stock phrases, and there is no celebration for victories; players are just dumped into an end-game menu. Despite these drawbacks, this football outing brings a lot to the field for casual players and sports fans alike.

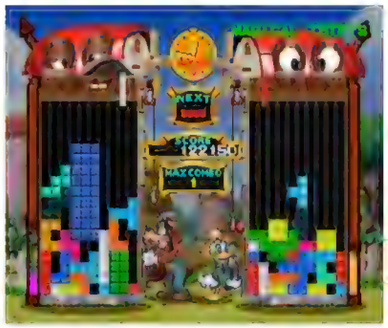
Reflections: The freedom offered in this game is impressive, from the custom plays and playbooks to the wealth of in-depth modes and play styles. The introduction of Franchise mode is this entry's significant mark, establishing it as an irreplaceable part of the series' feature set going forward. At the time of *Madden NFL 99*'s release, the Cleveland Browns were a year away from returning from a messy relocation attempt that left them inactive. You can enter the code WELCOMEBACK to return them to the game, though, which is a lovely time capsule from the era. – NT

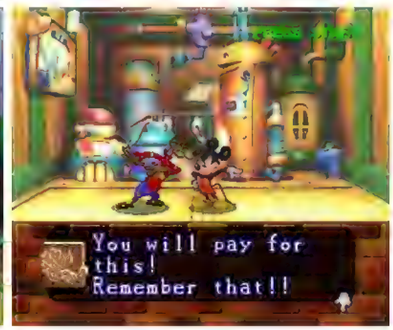
European Cartridge

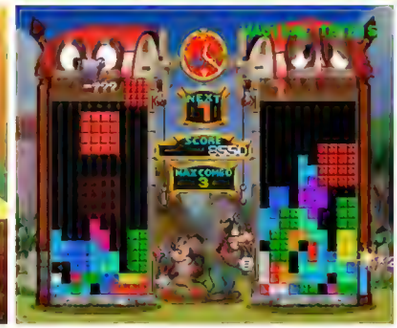
Magical Tetris Challenge

Magical Tetris Challenge Featuring Mickey (JP)
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom (JP, NA), Activision (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆









The iconic Mickey Mouse and his pals join forces with arguably the greatest puzzle franchise of all time. The core mechanics are about stacking different arrangements of falling blocks into neat horizontal lines, attempting to clear them and keep the screen as clear as possible without filling to the top of the tank. Updown Tetris mode sticks to this formula without any variation. The main mode, Magical Tetris, is played as a solo story or against a friend. Here, making large matches will send magical attacks to the opponent's screen, making it harder for them to keep their blocks in order. One attack adds atypical tetrominoes to the recipient's queue, which turns proper stacking into an intense challenge owing to their funky shapes and sizes. Players combat this by clearing lines before the awkward piece is ready to drop, redirecting the challenge back to the opponent and often resulting in gigantic 5x5 pieces falling into their screen. These behemoths cannot be returned and are a huge pain in the neck for anyone on the receiving end. A magical gauge slowly fills with each line match during normal play. Once it is full, all blocks above a certain point will be eliminated, including 5x5 pieces, and all blocks below will be neatly arranged. These puzzle mechanics are simple but still interesting, and the fact that they're dripping with Disney artwork and animations makes them more endearing. Whether it is the story mode, two-player, or an Endless mode run, the straightforward features give the player just enough puzzle excitement to keep them engaged. Don't get too comfortable, though. In the time it takes to watch Fantasia, one could run through Mickey, Minnie, Donald, and Goofy's adventure four times in a row. Simplicity, in this case, comes at the cost of longevity. In all, the puzzle challenge hits most of the right notes – it just feels like it does not go far enough to turn into something truly magical.

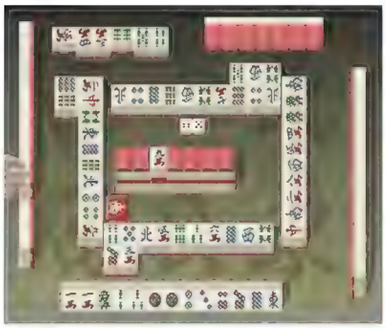
Reflections: What's it like when Disney meets *Tetris*? Well, mostly *Tetris*, just with Mickey involved. *Magical Tetris Challenge* doesn't stray far from the puzzle game's origins. In fact, long-time players won't even have to change their strategies to win round after round. *Magical Tetris Challenge* does do something distinctive, though, being one of the few 2D games on the N64. The sprite work is top-notch and classic Disney through and through. It's a better game for doing this, too, as trying to leverage the 3D capabilities of the system would have sacrificed some clarity and detail. – KS

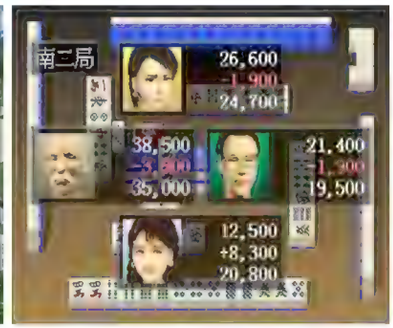
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Magical Tetris Challenge Featuring Mickey

Mahjong 64

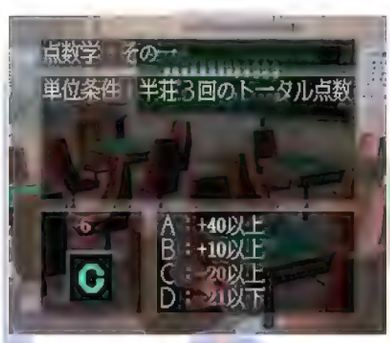
Genre: Tile Game, Simulation
Release Date: Apr. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Chat Noir
Publisher: Koei
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆





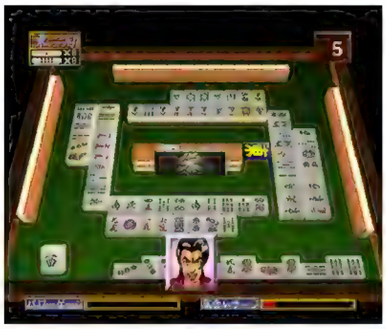
As a first-year student at Mahjong University, all that stands between the player and graduation is a wall of tiles, smug professors, and a roster of competing students. Mahjong is a game of drawing and discarding tiles, played with four people who take turns attempting to create a scoring hand with sets and runs based on the suit and number of their tiles. There are several campus locations to visit in this simulation-style mahjong title, including the school building, tournament hall, and library, which appear in the form of realistically drawn cartoon photos. There is a top-down view of the table with 3D tiles during play. Only hands are seen, but after every round, when the score is displayed, images of faces appear, which look different based on how each person performed. The main area is the school building, where the player picks one of six classes to earn grades for their report card. After choosing a class, play several rounds of mahjong against the professor and two other students. Each professor evaluates a different aspect of riichi (Japanese) mahjong, such as an overall score or a minimum han/fan value for a winning hand. Depending on how well the player performs, they receive a grade from A to D, the lower being a fail. Not all six classes must be passed to advance to the following year, but there is a limit to how many failing grades are allowed before it is game over, and each year tightens that threshold. However, the yearly tournament and assembly hall enable players to earn special points to retake a class if needed. After three years, the player graduates with a title and starts the process over again. Despite the educational setting, little is directly taught, and basic mahjong knowledge is assumed. The closest thing to a tutorial is the library, where there are quizzes to test understanding, like what tiles complete a given hand or how many points a particular one is worth. The classes indirectly teach by making different aspects of mahjong the focal point toward earning a good grade. The music is pleasant with various styles, and while the graphics are nothing noteworthy, the realistic facial expressions shine. With the addition of optional gameplay in the tournament and free play, there is enough variation to keep the experience from becoming too monotonous. This mahjong experience is an interesting take on the genre and forces players to compete in a variety of styles to excel.

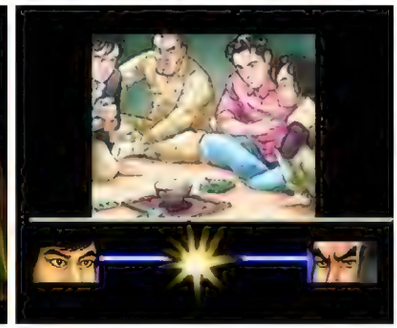
Reflections: I enjoyed *Mahjong 64* and look forward to returning to it. I love that all your statistics are tracked, and you aren't simply encouraged to win win win! Forcing me to play in a certain way helped push me as a mahjong player, and I can say I came away from this with more knowledge and strategy. I appreciate that all the students and teachers have their own looks and facial expressions. Strangely, it added a bit of emotion to winning and losing for me, seeing their sad or elated faces. I would gladly spend the rest of my tile-dealing days playing mahjong with the angry, mustachioed Tom Hanks look-alike. – KY



Mahjong Hōrōki Classic

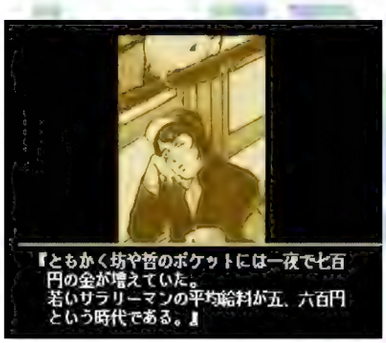
[Mahjong Chronicles Classic]
Genre: Tile Game
Release Date: Aug. 1997
Regions: JP
Developer: Alpha Unit
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1
Features: Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆





Can Bōya Tetsu, a down-on-his-luck newcomer, rise to become a master of mahjong? This title mixes a heavy dose of narrative into the traditional tile game with a deep backstory rooted in post-war Japan. The gameplay is standard four-player riichi mahjong, with players aiming to build scoring hands by exchanging tiles. Story mode tells Tetsu's journey using still images and text dialog boxes to describe events between matches. During play, the angled overhead view of the 3D tiles displays the wind, remaining tiles, and riichi declarations. Discarded tiles used in melds by opponents are highlighted in yellow. Opponents are ruthless and may prove difficult for newer players to overcome. Do not worry – cheat! A power gauge builds as the player scores winning hands, while a spirit gauge builds with each round. Cheating exhausts these meters and loads the player's hand with needed tiles. The more ambitious the cheat, the harder it is to execute. Breakdowns at the end of each hand and match help the player see where participants "earned" their points. A password save lets players resume where they left off. Free Battle mode lets the player fire up a quick match with any of the 12 characters, including Bōya Tetsu and Ken Dosa. Cheating mode, the last of three modes of play, is how players unlock the tricks used in Story or Free Battle. The goal is to survive as long as possible, with new players taking a seat each time someone hits zero points. Victories in this mode unlock cheats, so it is critical to spend time here before taking on Story. This unusual mechanic means players hoping to experience the plot must invest significant time in Cheating mode before having the tricks necessary to stand a chance in Story mode. Finally, an options menu allows players the choice of tile backing color and a sound test of the 36 different music tracks, but these add little to the rather bland interface and in-game experience. Even with a trick or two up its sleeve, this gritty mahjong venture is a constant grind, leaving players as jaded as the underhanded characters featured in its tale.

Reflections: The plot and characters in *Mahjong Hōrōki Classic* are based on the 1969 four-part novel penned by Takehiro Irokawa, a real-life mahjong criminal who wrote under various pseudonyms. He lays bare the dark and destructive nature of gambling in a series of stories that are anything but glamorous. In a real case of diverse transmediation, *Mahjong Hōrōki* was made into multiple films, including a recent revisit in 2020 and an excellent version from 1984, with the lead role of Bōya Tetsu portrayed by movie star Hiroyuki "Duke" Sanada. Credit to the development team for trying to capture the story's tone and the mechanics of cheating, but those looking for a mahjong game have better options. The books and films better serve those eager to consume this unique narrative. – DG

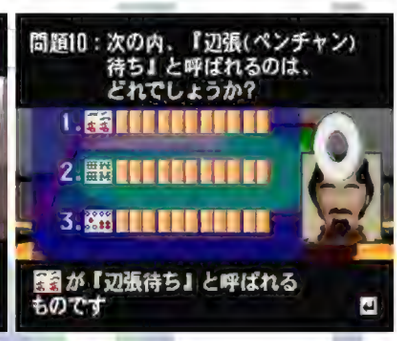


Mahjong Master

Genre: Tile Game
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: JP
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

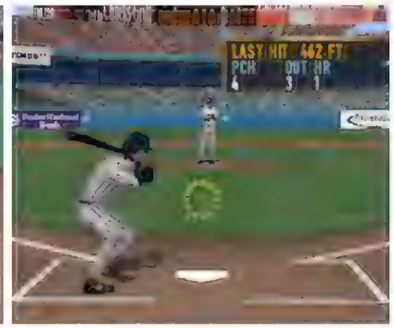
"What is Mah-Jong for you?" It may sound weirdly existential, but this simple question is at the heart of this unassuming mahjong experience as its opening credits roll. If the player uses a Controller Pak, a follow-up at the South End mahjong parlor lets them register with their name. Seven characters are then introduced, and the player chooses a favorite to interact with as they start their mahjong journey. The play generally revolves around winning games of mahjong, in which the player must skillfully exchange tiles to score winning hands before their opponents. Games are displayed top-down, with the player's tiles and game commands at the bottom of the screen and opponents' hands and portraits on the other sides. Otherwise, the presentation is almost entirely text boxes and still images showing the current location. At home, the player has a menu screen displaying the in-game date and the four available modes of play, and options to view player statistics, save, read up on the rules, or quit. Free mode lets the player select a venue and opponents. Rules can be heavily customized in Free mode, greatly expanding the variety of these exhibition matches. Story mode features a three-tiered league where the player earns standings points match-by-match in a year-long season. The player must finish high enough in their current league to advance to the next, eventually becoming the top player in the A league and earning the adoration of their peers. Players can earn additional points by qualifying for and winning special Title matches. These usually have variant rules, but the standings points earned in them count towards league rankings. Battle mode is a one-on-one mahjong game against an opponent in a simulated Internet setting. Finally, Quiz mode is a question-and-answer competition to test the player's knowledge of mahjong. There is a lot of welcome polish here, with quality background music, lovely images of the various venues, and a very intuitive in-game UI. While some additional ease-of-play features at the table would have made this a great game, it gets a lot of the mahjong experience right while having enough variety to have staying power.

Reflections: While the intense, dramatic poetry of its opening movie and its choice of title might make this seem like a veteran's selection, *Mahjong Master* is surprisingly friendly to newcomers. The use of icons in the UI makes it accessible to all, but those who speak Japanese will get quite a lot out of the hefty instruction manual! It includes detailed breakdowns of the types of scoring hands and a handy chart of all the rules of a match, highlighting which settings are defaulted for each. There is also a section dedicated to explaining the individual rules for each Title match – the different venues and rulesets make them feel unique, lending personality to what can otherwise feel like a fairly repetitive game. The character breakdowns give the opposition some personality to their playstyle, too, though the cast itself does leave something to be desired. – DG



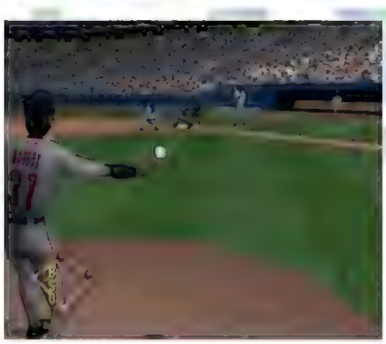
Major League Baseball Featuring Ken Griffey Jr.

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Angel Studios
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



Nintendo steps up to the plate with a 64-bit rendition of their Ken Griffey Jr.-endorsed baseball simulation. When fielding, the in-game camera will follow the ball from a top-down view and then dynamically cut into slick broadcast-like camera angles when throwing the ball to each base. Meanwhile, a traditional behind-the-catcher perspective handles pitching and batting. Each pitcher has four distinct pitches available to them, and after selecting one, maneuvering a cursor determines where to land the pitch. When batting, the player will have their cursor to attempt to line it up with the moving target cursor of the incoming pitch and time when to swing the bat to make contact. It is not as complex as it sounds and straightforward to both grasp and master, but a simpler "classic" option is available, focusing solely on timing when to swing. Taking advantage of their diamond-shaped layout, the C-buttons naturally align with where to throw the baseball (C-left corresponds to third base, for example). Moving players defensively around the field is fast and responsive; however, it can be difficult to determine which athlete control is defaulted to when fielding ground balls that require quick reflexes. It only happens a few times a game, but for frustrated players, there is a useful auto-field option that delegates fielder movement to the AI, but players will still have to control throwing to bases. Playing both sides of baseball is engaging and fun and moves at a brisk pace, with each game typically finishing within a half hour. There are four modes to play: Exhibition sets up a single match between one or two players, World Series sets up a best-of-seven championship series, and Home Run Derby (up to four players) determines who can crush the most homers before 10 failed attempts. Finally, Season mode has selectable 27, 81, or 162 game schedules, plus playoffs with additional stat tracking, customizable line-ups and rotations, trades, and potential injuries. A splendid audio/visual package features a catchy opening theme with lyrics from Griffey, pleasantly subdued – yet optional – background music, and finely detailed animated competitors. This scorecard ultimately tallies up to entertaining and fast-paced hardball, ideal for many doubleheader sessions!

Reflections: After going without a full roster of MLBPA players for the two SNES Griffey entries, Nintendo finally covered the costs here for the MLBPA license. This generation's emerging trait for baseball games was trying to incorporate as many authentic player-specific batting stances as possible, and the first N64 Griffey title impressed big time in this department. As a '90s kid with the Twins as my home team, friends and I would always try our best Chuck Knoblauch batting stance impression and wildly crouch down like him during neighborhood games. Knoblauch would be with the Yankees when *Major League Baseball Featuring Ken Griffey Jr.* came out, but his trademark stance carried into both New York and this game! – DK



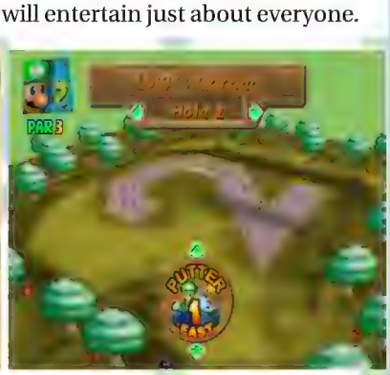
European Cartridge

Mario Golf

Genre: Sports
Release Date: July 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Camelot Software Planning
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Hit the links with Mario, Yoshi, Bowser, and friends as they compete for the title of greatest golfer in the Mushroom Kingdom! In this 3D outing, players first select a golfer (four available at the start with 10 more unlockable), such as Baby Mario or Peach, or non-Mario "normal" golfers like Charlie or Plum. Players select a proper club for each shot and aim for a good look at the hole. A simple swing meter determines players' shot quality, with three timely presses of a single button determining power and accuracy. Be sure to factor wind and hills into shot decisions or find shots blown off course or stuck at the bottom of a hill. These mechanics combine to reward excellent timing and strategy, although there are occasionally inexplicably bad results on seemingly good shots. There are six colorful Mushroom Kingdom-themed courses, including the cheery Toad Highlands, barren Shy Guy Desert, and gloomy Boo Valley. In solo play, players can test themselves in an 18-hole tournament, challenge characters to unlock them, play single rounds of golf as fast as possible, and attempt individual holes while navigating through sets of out-of-the-way rings. Multiplayer supports either human or CPU golfers and includes rounds with varying win conditions (fewest strokes through a round, winner of the most holes) and one where the choice of clubs is limited by the lucky spin of a slot machine. Players can even putt-putt their way through two mini-golf courses featuring alphabet- and number-themed holes! Fourteen characters vary primarily in the distance they can hit the ball; beginners should take care before selecting power hitters like Donkey Kong, as their shots are less accurate than lighter-hitting characters like Princess Peach. Characters can also be leveled up in the Game Boy Color release via the Transfer Pak and copied to the Nintendo 64 to utilize their custom skill sets. The graphics are refined and adorable, and the music is also good, with compositions for each course and ditties for putting, sink-to-win, and miss-and-lose situations. Mario's first 3D golf excursion fuses a strategic and enjoyable approach to golf with more than enough variants on the sport to create an experience that will entertain just about everyone.

Reflections: Externally developed games like *Donkey Kong Country* (Rare) and *Super Mario RPG* (Squaresoft) on the SNES opened the door for outside developers to work with Nintendo's cherished characters. In the N64 and Game Boy Color era, Nintendo stepped out even further by tasking the likes of Hudson Soft (*Mario Party*), Intelligent Systems (*Paper Mario*), and Capcom (*The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons/Ages*) to develop fresh takes on Nintendo properties. Camelot's *Mario Golf* is a shining example of just how well these kinds of partnerships can work. Its success has led to several subsequent sequels on both handheld and home consoles. – JM



European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Mario Kart 64

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Mario and pals climb into go-karts and challenge one another for wacky racing superiority. The camera sits behind the player's racer as they cut through curves, leap gaps using dash pads, and collect the best items to use against opponents. Mario Grand Prix is the heart of the experience. It pits the player against seven computer-controlled kart drivers across four different Cups, Mushroom, Flower, Star, and Special, each with four courses to compete for first place. In all three speed options – 50cc, 100cc, and 150cc – successful racing will involve dodging moles in Moo Moo Farm, weaving through traffic in Toad's Turnpike, avoiding belly-sliding penguins in Sherbet Land, and so much more. Eight playable drivers will tackle courses: Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, Yoshi, Toad, Donkey Kong, Bowser, and Wario. Drivers have different weight, acceleration, and top speed attributes, lending a slightly different playstyle for each. Smooth controls make the spin around the tracks pleasurable, but the races are more than just completing laps. Item boxes dot each course and grant a semi-random power-up each time one is touched. Items can be offensive or defensive: thrown banana peels cause racers to slip off course or stop, and orbiting shells serve as a shield, which can also be thrown at opponents (green shells in a single direction while red ones home in on the racer ahead). Other unique items include dash mushrooms, invincibility Super Stars, Boo (turns the driver invisible and steals an opponent's item), or a Thunder Bolt that shrinks the other racers to tiny, slow, squishable versions of themselves. The gameplay leans heavily on a rubberbanding AI system that endows CPU-controlled karts with impressive speed boosts when they fall behind. The position in the race also affects which items a player can receive from the boxes. If they are in first place, the player will probably only snag banana peels and green shells, but if they are last, it is more likely to be a Super Star, Thunder Bolts, or even the dreaded Spiny Shell, which will track and blow up the kart in the lead.

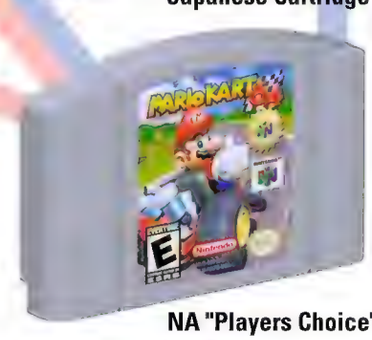
The gameplay is very accessible while allowing room for skilled play. The basic controls are easy to understand, but there are more advanced maneuvers like sliding through turns and the Mini Turbo, which occurs after drifting around a curve. Grand Prix is a race against CPU opponents, or a friend can join in split-screen competition. Versus mode lets two, three, or four human players face off in a split-screen race. Choose the course and characters, but be prepared to rage at friends who try to take you out. Time Trials mode allows running a course without items and opponents for the best time. Battle mode ditches the racing and focuses on item-based mayhem. Here, two, three, or four players battle it out in the middle of one of four combat arenas. Players have three balloons attached to their kart, which act as lives for when a driver gets hit by someone's projectile (or slips on their banana peel or is hit by their own shell). The last driver to survive wins bragging rights. Whether racing alone or battling with friends, the excitement, high polish, outstanding soundtrack, and wholesomeness all result in a fantastic ride.

Reflections: Starting with the Super NES, a Mario Kart title has been released on nearly every Nintendo console since. Many consider it the ultimate party game, so it is no surprise that every iteration is a hit. *Mario Kart 64* is only second to *Super Mario 64* in the number of N64 cartridges sold, at almost 10 million. Decades after its release, I still think *Mario Kart 64*'s Battle mode is some of the best multiplayer gaming ever. It's so simple, yet there is still room to strategize. Winning in any mode is two parts skill and one part luck, meaning there is always a chance the more experienced player will lose. The entire experience embraces a spirit of unpredictability in perfectly measured amounts. Yes, you need to practice courses and master finer techniques to get really good, but you can still get smashed by a Spiny Shell. *Mario Kart 64* is the type of game players come back to time and time again. Hitting friends with shells, falling off the track in Rainbow Road, and making banana peel barriers to trip up racers never gets old. Whether in it for the item-based action or enjoy speedrunning courses, you will find plenty to love in this classic title. – JBa

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Version 1



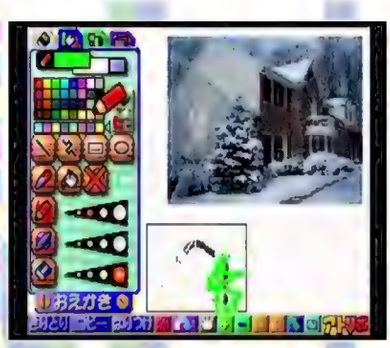
NA "Players Choice" Version 2

Mario no Photopi

[Mario's Photo]
Genre: Creativity
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP
Dev.: Nintendo, Hagiwara Syscom, Datt Japan
Pub: Hagiwara Syscom, Tokyo Electron
Players: 1
Features: SmartMedia Card Reader
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

Mario returns to his creative side, entering a feature-rich photo studio to edit, manipulate, and enhance any picture a player can provide. Before even turning on the N64, amateur photogs are greeted by arguably the oddest cartridge on the console, housing a slot on the top that accepts two SmartMedia cards. Loading images onto the card from a PC or camera allows them access to Mario's capable photo editing studio. Uploading them is painfully long, taking minutes to load a single page of six images. Three picture styles are available within the studio: postcards, name cards, posters, and a simple video-like slideshow option with basic transitions. After selecting the style and slowly loading an image from the card, the photo manipulation takes a decidedly "Mario" turn with simple features, like adjusting the hue represented by red, green, and blue Yoshis eating fruit or Mario's gloved hand being the primary cursor. Characters from all over the Mushroom Kingdom appear as icons and menu UI, such as Boos, Goombas, and Toad. The bright and colorful presentation invites even the most novice photo editor to play with the settings. Unfortunately, the toolset is severely limited in options and use. Each image has a maximum of six layers, and each layer can only be one style, such as a text layer (six characters maximum) or a Mario clip art layer (one clip art maximum). It is impossible to have a layer containing freestyle doodles and a border, or text and background. Editing is fine with a standard controller, but a superior option is a Nintendo 64 Mouse. Once completed, pictures can be saved to the card and printed from a PC or a Fuji Photo Film kiosk. Mario can also pop over and play a simple flipping tile puzzle in three difficulty levels, using either the title screen image or one imported from the card. However, if a player lacks said rare card, there is nothing for players to do except for the default tile flip puzzle. All other features, even clip art and doodles, are locked away. A bright soundtrack and delightful visuals mean nothing without a means to experience it. Those lucky enough to have both card and cartridge are treated to a competent photo editor, but there isn't much to hold players' attention past a few cute colors.

Reflections: Originally slated for the 64DD peripheral, *Mario no Photopi* development shifted to the N64 console. However, due to the unorthodox cartridge and reliance on SmartMedia memory cards, *Mario no Photopi* is somewhat tricky to play. Finding a working cartridge is hard enough, but locating a functional blank card elevates it to the unicorn tier of collectibles. Besides including a blank SmartMedia card for use, several themed memory cards were available separately as part of the "Characters collection." These cards featured image editing assets from properties like Hello Kitty, Bomberman, *Yoshi's Story*, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, and even one for Sylvanian Families (a series of flocked anthropomorphic animal figurines). Not many of these cards have survived to this day. This all adds up to *Mario no Photopi* being little more than a modern-day curio. – CPr

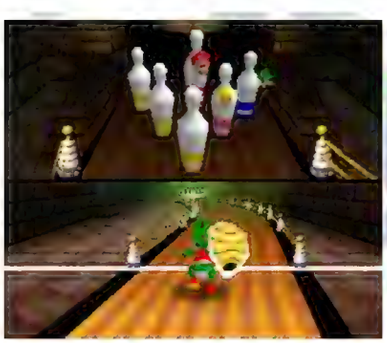


Mario Party

Genre: Action, Board Game
Release Date: Feb. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆

Help Mario and his pals decide who is the greatest Super Star in this exciting hootenanny. Players primarily play on eight Adventure Boards with different paths and events, including DK's Jungle Adventure, Yoshi's Tropical Island, and even a war-torn battlefield in Wario's Battle Canyon. These third-person adventures take place over 20, 35, or 50 turns, feature four players (human or CPU-controlled), and are split between board game-styled overworlds and mini-games. On the overworld, each character (from six selectable) takes turns jumping and hitting a die block and moving that randomly selected number of spaces until they land on one of the circular spaces along the board's paths. Board spaces always have an effect, usually altering characters' coins or causing an event such as a movement direction change. The ultimate goal is to save coins and buy stars from Toad, as the player with the most stars at the end of the last turn is declared the winner. The primary coin collection method is the mini-games played at the end of each turn. These 50 mini-games come in a huge variety of styles and are available in a four-player free-for-all, two versus two, or one versus three setups depending on the color of the spaces each character stands on at the end of the preceding turn. Win some coins by jumping over fire, racing in bobsleds and slot cars, and playing tug-of-war, just to name a few. Mini-games are also available outside the Adventure Boards via the single-player Mini-Game Island adventure and the multiplayer-focused Mini-Game Stadium. Alternatively, they can be bought individually via the Mushroom Shop and Mini-Game House on the main menu. These extra modes provide an excellent incentive to master everything. The boards and mini-game combination offer a robust marriage of physical and video game genres. The experience is only slightly marred by a few mini-games requiring unreasonable controller inputs (namely constant analog stick twirling and extended rapid button presses). Ultimately, this party is well worth the time, especially if friends join in on the fun.

Reflections: The depth of content found in *Mario Party* makes it almost infinitely replayable, and for me, that is a hallmark of a great multiplayer experience. Equally admirable is how much of a love letter the game's audio and visual design is to the Mario universe. Characters, settings, and excellent remixes of songs from Mario's history are all present, and it is almost as fun to pore over the Adventure Boards looking for small details as it is to play them. I wish the same level of care had been applied to planning the controls, if only so that my poor palms could have been spared analog stick-shaped blisters. Of course, if you were aware of a lawsuit filed by the state of New York, you could receive a free glove from Nintendo in exchange for your misery, so in the end, it was the lawyers who were the real Super Stars! – CP

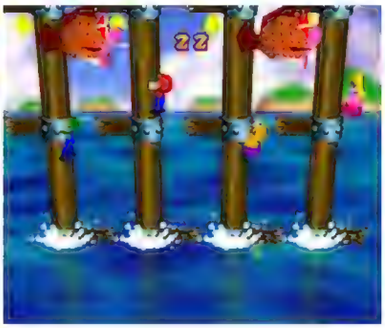


European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

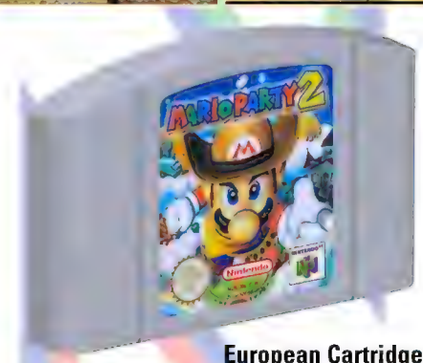
Mario Party 2

Genre: Action, Board Game
Release Date: Jan. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft, CAProduction
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆



Mario and his friends have built a new world and must compete in a variety of Board Games to decide whose name will appear on it. These Board Games occur across 20, 35, or 50 turns on six Adventure Boards, which use popular adventure settings, including pirate, cowboy, and horror themes. Four players, controlled from a third-person perspective by humans or the computer, use characters such as Yoshi, Princess Peach, Luigi, Wario, and Donkey Kong to hit the Dice Block and move along the boards' pathways. Each player's turn ends when they land on one of the colored spaces set along the board, at which point their number of coins is altered or a random event occurs – these events are based on the level theme and usually send players back to the starting space or change the board's layout. The goal is to save coins and buy stars from Toad, as victory goes to the player with the most stars at the end of the final turn. Coins are chiefly earned through the 65 mini-games played at the end of each turn. Mini-games come in a huge variety of styles. They are played in single-player, four-player free-for-all, two-versus-two, one-versus-one, or one-versus-three formats, depending on the color of the space that each character stood on during the preceding turn. Platforming over falling planks, racing on handcars, and climbing the masts of a sinking ship are just a few examples of what players can expect from these bite-sized competitions. Mini-games can also be played outside the Adventure Boards via the Mini-Game Park. They can be played individually or in marathons through the single-player Mini-Game Coaster or the multiplayer-focused Mini-Game Stadium. While most mini-games are fun, a few are completely luck-based, which negates any need for skill or competitiveness. While this lack of control is frustrating when it occurs, it is a small smear in an otherwise fun and often raucous experience.

Reflections: *Mario Party 2* could easily have been a simple update to its predecessor, but Hudson Soft and Nintendo instead opted to create a wholly distinct experience. This change is perhaps most apparent in the design of the character models – both playable and non-playable characters are given unique costumes for each Adventure Board, resulting in a more cohesive visual experience. The increase in mini-games and more careful consideration of their controls provide the same nigh-endless levels of fun as the first game without any taxing physical toll. Though there are two fewer boards this time, their design's intricacy ensures that they, and by extension, the entire game itself, always feel fresh. – CP



European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Mario Party 3

Genre: Action, Board Game
Release Date: May 2001
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Hudson Soft, CAProduction
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

The Millennium Star has been reborn, and Mario and his friends are vying to see who gets to possess it and become the Superstar of the Universe by partying, dueling, and competing in 71 mini-games! Playtime is divided into two types, Battle Royal Boards and Duel Maps, which can be freely selected from Party Mode or played in a marathon through Story Mode. Each type contains unique rules, but both are played from a third-person perspective with one of eight selectable characters, including mainstays such as Luigi and Peach and newcomers Waluigi and Daisy. Battle Royal Boards are structured like board games and take place over a set number of turns (from 10 to 50 in increments of five). Four players, controlled by humans or the computer, take turns hitting the Dice Block and advancing along pathways, eventually landing on colored spaces that alter players' coins or cause a board-based random event, such as a sandstorm-induced direction change, to occur. The six boards are themed after natural environments and include an icy lake, sweltering desert, gloomy cave, tropical island, dense forest, and ocean floor. The ultimate goal on these boards is to save coins and land on the Millenium Star's space to buy stars from it, as the player with the highest star count at the end of the final turn is the overall winner. Meanwhile, Duel Maps feature two players who take turns hitting the Dice Block to move along paths and land on spaces to encounter and reduce each other's health points (from five to zero) by battling with buyable partners such as Chain Chomp, Boo, and Snifit. While the dice roll mechanics are identical to their board counterparts, the spaces on which the characters land function differently; players claim unoccupied spaces, after which they can take coins from their opponent if they land on them. The six maps each feature a different kind of shortcut, such as toll gates or warp pipes, allowing players to plan a variety of movement strategies. There are no stars on these maps, so each player solely focuses on collecting coins, as the richer player wins if neither side manages to deplete their opponent's health by the end of the final turn.

The primary coin collection method for both game types is the mini-games, played at the end of each turn on the Battle Royal Boards and by landing on specific spaces on the Duel Maps. Mini-games can be played in four-player free-for-all, single-player, one-versus-one, two-versus-two, or one-versus-three formats depending on the color of the space that each player ended their turn on (Battle Maps are exclusively one-versus-one). Mini-game types include a multi-vehicle relay race, all-out aerial dogfighting, even a four-player block puzzle contest, and lots more. The mini-games are highly varied and well-balanced, and since they can be played freely from the boards and maps via the Mini-Game Room, there is always fun to be found with them. Between two fully-realized game types, intricately crafted boards and maps, and enough mini-games to satisfy even the hardiest partier, this party game is jam-packed with enjoyable content for solo and multiple players alike.

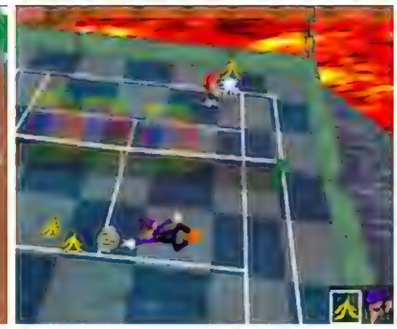
Reflections: *Mario Party 3* is a fantastic sendoff for the first generation of Mario Party titles, as it not only takes the best parts of its predecessors and refines them but also introduces new elements to establish itself as a unique entity. The developers got the mini-games just right this time, with no control issues or luck-based components. The excellent board designs from the first two titles are back and as charmingly detailed as ever, while the addition of the Duel Maps allows for more simple, intense experiences. Including a Story Mode allows all of these elements to be taken in as parts of a greater whole. The independent board/map selection and greater flexibility of turn numbers in Party Mode allow for near-infinite replayability, perhaps the most important staple of this series, to shine as brilliantly as the Millenium Star itself. – CP

European Cartridge

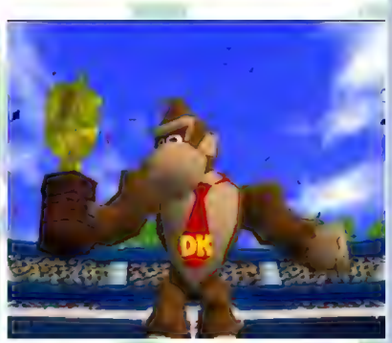
Japanese Cartridge

Mario Tennis

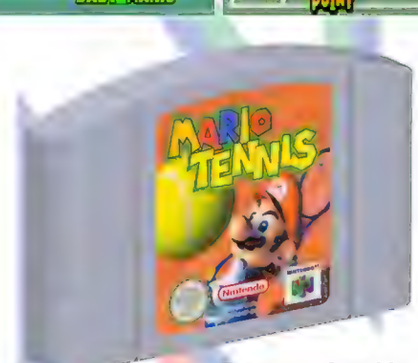
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Camelot Software Planning
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆



The portly plumber and the rest of the gang hit the court for some fast-paced and whimsical single- or multi-player tennis action. Choose between three different third-person camera perspectives to keep an eye on the ball, including a standard courtside view and behind-the-character angles. Use the Control Stick to move and the A and B buttons to serve and volley. More advanced shots require more complicated inputs, like the lob, which requires first pressing A and then quickly pressing B, or the smash shot, which uses both A and B together. Exhibition mode is ideal for trying out all 14 playable characters, each with unique strengths on the court. For example, players can go with Wario for a power hitter, Baby Mario for speed, Peach for technique, and Mario or Luigi for an all-around skill set. Customize Exhibition mode by switching between solo or doubles with any combination of computer or human partners and opponents, up to four in all. Tournament mode lets a single player take on computer opponents across varying court surfaces (hard, grass, and clay), which affect ball speed and bounce strength. Completing matches earns the championship and unlocks even more tournaments and courts. Additional modes take the action a step away from traditional tennis matches, like Ring Shot, which challenges players to hit the ball through ring targets, and Piranha mode, where Piranha Plants spit dozens of balls at a rapid pace. The most unusual mode is Bowser Stage, which takes a standard tennis setup and adds items to the mix, including turtle shells for stunning opponents, mushrooms that speed players up, and banana peels to toss at players. Players with a copy of *Mario Tennis* for the Game Boy Color and a Transfer Pak will get much more out of both games, as transfers back and forth can unlock additional courts, characters, and mini-games for both titles. The entire experience straddles a fine line between sports simulation and arcade-style fun. Ultimately, it masterfully serves up enough realism for loyal tennis fans while providing enough whimsy and variety for less seasoned players.



Reflections: My older sister was an avid tennis player, and she convinced me that a video game based on her favorite sport (not my favorite sport) would be fun. I picked up the original NES *Tennis* and discovered she wasn't wrong. I have many fond memories of *Mario Tennis*, which left me with a soft spot for subsequent Nintendo tennis titles, starting with this early entry in the franchise. Its cartoon-like appearance and distinct player characteristics, such as Donkey Kong's chest-beating and Daisy's clumsiness on the podium, add a ton of charm to the experience. Yet, they frame solid tennis action that's just as deep and interesting as any "serious" effort. Nintendo truly knows how to make sports games appealing to everyone. – JBr



European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Masters '98: Harukanaru Augusta

[Masters '98: Distant Augusta]
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: T&E Soft
Publisher: T&E Soft
Players: 1-4
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Rare
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

This golf sim lets one to four players take on a surprisingly accurate representation of the prestigious Augusta National golf course. There are several modes: the full four-day Masters Tournament with an 80-person field; Tournament, which condenses the Masters down to its final round; Stroke Play, an 18-hole competition for the lowest score; Match Play, a two-player mode where the goal is to win the most holes by round's end; and Training, which allows players to practice on any hole at their own pace. Except for Match Play and Training, each mode can be played with up to four players who alternate taking shots. Players can craft each shot on the course with options to change club, stance, and hit point on the ball. The quality of drives and chips will depend on how well they account for the lie, winds, and grasp over a timing-based swing meter, which takes three presses of the A button (the first press activates the meter, the second determines power, and the third decides accuracy). It doesn't take long to get the hang of the swing mechanics with the driver and irons, but putting can take some getting used to for novice players. Players will likely feel their way to the hole for a round or two before getting accustomed to reading greens and gauging the strength needed for a given putt. A 3D topography grid over the green helps players get there, though. Time spent golfing will result in more consistent performance and confidence in taking high-risk shots. Although there are several modes to play, it is easy to exhaust them fairly quickly, and there is not much more to show for it except a feeling of accomplishment. Augusta National is also the only course available – honestly, it could look better. Each hole is put together with grainy 3D textures and filled with blurry trees, bushes, and spectators muddy enough to detract from the experience. The several scanned-in, nameless player golfers noticeably clash with the 3D environments due to their detailed nature. There is a decent round of golf with respectable audio commentary, but the overall experience's significant drawbacks mean it barely makes the cut.

Reflections: It was interesting to see Augusta National in video game form. Growing up (and even now), it had always been the rare and valuable white whale to golf games. So much so that when EA Sports finally got the course and the Masters tournament for *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2012*, it wasn't just a back-of-the-box selling point; the course itself was the cover star. *Harukanaru Augusta* is, at best, a serviceable golf sim with a high novelty factor of exploring an iconic venue. – NT

Mega Man 64

Rockman DASH: Hagane no Bōkenshin (JP)
[Rockman DASH: Adventurous Spirit of Steel]
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Jan. 2001
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Mega Man returns as an ambitious excavator in a far-flung future in this third-person action-adventure title. This time, the blue bomber has become a Digger, a licensed adventurer who scours ancient ruins in search of energy sources called Refractors, braving the hostile Reaverbots and deadly traps found within. After an ill-fated raid on some ruins, Mega Man's family crashes their ship onto Kattelox Island. There, they run afoul of a family of pirates, the Bonnes, seeking the Mother Lode, a legendary treasure that would forever provide enough energy to the world. The player must face off against the Bonnes and the ruins' defenses to reach it first. The story reveals itself through heavy amounts of dialogue in both text and fully-voiced cutscenes. Mega Man runs, jumps, and climbs using either the Control Stick or the Control Pad and turns using the shoulder buttons. Offensively, Mega Man kicks or attacks using his trusty Mega Buster blaster. Scrap parts like Blunted Drills and Broken Circuits can be found in chests in ruins or purchased from the Junk Shop and combined into new weapons and special items like the Helmet or the Power Buster, courtesy of Mega Man's sister Roll. The acquisition and use of these special weapons, such as the Machine Buster or Blade Arm, provide an additional layer of strategy. Enemies are not terribly varied. Though there are some outstanding examples, like the members of the Bonne clan and their blocky Servbot minions, the Reaverbots share a very similar design aesthetic. They often die quickly and do not pose a serious obstacle. There is no robust targeting system, but players can lock on to a nearby foe by pressing L+R (or Z) to assist in aiming and making an invulnerable dodge-roll to avoid enemy attacks. The gameplay is tricky to master where combat is concerned, and players often rely on auto-aim rather than the lock-on mode. Because of this lack of targeting precision, some boss fights can become frustrating loops. The player can save their game by tracking down and talking to a strange robotic monkey named Data, who can also replenish Mega Man's life bar and provide helpful information. While the gameplay is not always precise, a well-paced story and lovely graphics result in an enjoyable, clanking adventure through a land of robots.

Reflections: Three years after *Mega Man Legends* was released on the PlayStation, Capcom delivered this port to N64 players craving a new adventure with the Blue Bomber. It wasn't exactly what I hoped for when released, but it quickly won me over. Dropping the rock-paper-scissors robot master fights of the classic 2D games in favor of an exploration game resembling something like *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* was a massive shift in gameplay and tone. However, the faint tinge of melancholy and the lighthearted character interactions make *Mega Man 64* a unique addition to the storied franchise. – CW

Japanese Cartridge
Rockman DASH: Hagane no Bōkenshin

Mia Hamm Soccer 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: DC Studios, Silicon Dreams Studio
Publisher: SouthPeak Interactive
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

This soccer simulation has the unique distinction of being the first women's soccer title, with official branding from 1999 World Cup champion Mia Hamm. Action on the pitch transpires from selectable side, top-down, or isometric perspectives. Players new to soccer can activate in-game "Mia's Hot Tip" prompts during play stoppages that educate on the sport's nuances. Combining tips with spending time in Practice mode to play without restrictions or setting up various soccer situations (Corner Kicks, Penalty Kicks, and Free Kicks) helps to acclimate with the controls. An intuitive "Flight Path Indicator" provides an adjustable trajectory arrow for various kicks and throw-ins. The remaining controls for passing, shooting, and defensive tackles become second nature within a few matches. Players can dial up the controls to the "Professional" setting for deeper techniques that require more precise timing, like double-tapping the B button while the ball is in flight to execute a Power Header. The core soccer gameplay performs well offensively, and on-screen radar assists with planning. The questionable auto-switching of the closest player to the ball on defense can lead to many frustrating defensive gaffes. Formations and substitutions can be applied midgame, adding a strategic element. There are 32 international and 18 United States teams, with unlicensed clubs and players except for Mia Hamm herself. Unfortunately, there is a glaring lack of a player or team editor to update names to their real-life counterparts. All modes support up to four players, whether one-off Exhibition and Quick Start or full-length seasons and customizable tournaments. The weather effects of snowy and rainy fields and the well-animated players impress visually, but the player models are rather bland. Ambient crowd noise and chants are disappointingly minimal. Television broadcaster Wendy Gebauer provides steady, on-point commentary. Playing as all-women teams helps this otherwise average soccer title stand out more than it ordinarily would have.

Reflections: SouthPeak Interactive capitalized on the United States women winning the World Cup in 1999 by producing the first dedicated women's soccer game. Remarkably, the option to even play as an all-women team would not appear in another one until 15 years later, in *FIFA '16*. *Mia Hamm Soccer 64* did not originate this way; SouthPeak contracted DC Studios for the American release and replaced male player models from the PAL version of *Michael Owen's World League Soccer 2000* with female player models. The core gameplay and features remain nearly identical, and thus, the text for those elements of the review are shared between both versions, which, due to the alphabetizing of the N64 library, you should find directly following this review. – DK

Michael Owen's World League Soccer 2000

Telefoot Soccer 2000 (FRA)
RTL World League Soccer 2000 (GER)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: PAL
Developer: Silicon Dreams Studio
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

This soccer simulation has the official branding from English footballer Michael Owen for the UK release, the RTL TV network for the German edition, and the Téléfoot television show for the French release. Action on the pitch transpires from selectable side, top-down, or isometric perspectives. Players new to soccer can invest time in Practice mode to play without restrictions; setting up various soccer situations, such as Corner Kicks, Penalty Kicks, and Free Kicks, helps them acclimate to the controls. An intuitive "Flight Path Indicator" provides an adjustable trajectory arrow for kicks and throw-ins. The remaining controls for passing, shooting, and defensive tackles become second nature within a few matches. Controls can be dialed up to the "Professional" setting for deeper techniques that require more precise timing, like double-tapping the B button while the ball is in flight to execute a Power Header. The core soccer gameplay performs well offensively, and on-screen radar assists with game planning. The questionable auto-switching of the closest players to the ball on defense can lead to many frustrating defensive gaffes. Over 200 international and regional teams are available, with the English Premier League license for their official teams and players and filling the remaining leagues and athletes with artificial names. Unfortunately, this outing lacks a player or team editor to update names to their real-life counterparts. Formations and substitutions can be applied midgame, adding a strategic element. All game modes support up to four players, whether one-off Exhibition and Quick Start games or full-length seasons and customizable tournaments. The weather effects of snowy and rainy fields and the well-animated players impress visually, but the player models are rather bland. Ambient crowd noise and chants are disappointingly minimal. Peter Brackley's television broadcasting translates well here with his effective commentary. While this contains a well-rounded feature set, the gameplay is serviceable at best, with the defensive mechanical issues preventing it from emerging as championship material.

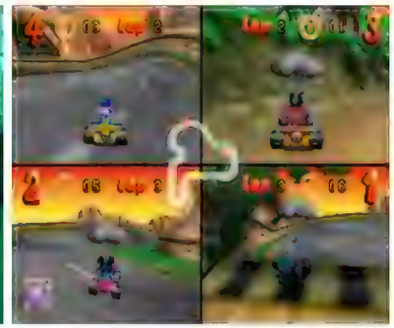
Reflections: In case you missed the review directly preceding this one, this otherwise by-the-numbers soccer game will likely be remembered as the game that developer DC Studios was hired to repackage with women players for the North American market a year later as *Mia Hamm Soccer 64*. The controls and features remain nearly identical; thus, the text for those parts of the review is shared. Aside from the gender swap, the primary difference with this PAL release is regional clubs for each country, additional championship tournaments, and a male announcer. Michael Owen landed the UK cover athlete spot following his breakout performance in the 1998 World Cup, where he became England's youngest ever to play and score in the prestigious tournament, doing both when he was 18 years old. – DK

French Cartridge
Telefoot Soccer 2000

German Cartridge
RTL World League Soccer 2000

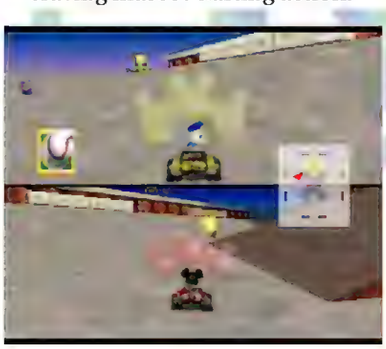
Mickey's Speedway USA

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak (NA, PAL)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



Mickey Mouse has a need for speed in this toonfully ludicrous third-person racer. Not so he can become champion or anything so glamorous, but to rescue his dog, Pluto, from the devious Weasels. Inexplicably, this sends Mickey and his friends hopping into experimental race cars and battling across 21 of the United States' most famous escapes, the kidnapped dog barely an afterthought. Whether cruising the smooth straightaways of Indianapolis, drifting the twisted thoroughfares of a toonified New York, or seeking shortcuts in the electric mecca of Las Vegas, players must outdrive, outsmart, and outlast ten of Disney's biggest icons. At the start, six characters are available, each possessing certain advantages. Daisy's car, for instance, excels in handling and acceleration, while the portly Pete bullies the streets with his superior weight and speed. However, they all have the gameplay's preeminent technique in common: by holding R while accelerating and turning, players can artfully powerslide around bends without losing momentum. Additionally, C-up and C-down jump between camera perspectives for a better measure of the incoming action. Skill alone does not earn the trophy, though, as tracks are crammed with enough randomized weapons to leave even the sweetest Minnie seething with rage. Ricocheting baseballs, exploding remote-control cars, energy drinks doubling as nitrous oxide; nab one of seven such items to gain a temporary lead. Moreover, "Oomph Tokens" sprinkle the tracks, incrementally increasing a racer's overall speed. That added edge is needed. To unlock every character and championship cup, players must secure first place across three demanding difficulties, plus seek secret car parts hidden within specific locales. Multiplayer provides a welcome distraction from this ongoing grind, allowing up to four players to either race the Grand Prix or partake in some battle royale-style action. Players with a Transfer Pak and the Game Boy Color version of *Mickey's Speedway USA* can unlock an extra character, which is a pleasant surprise. This experience offers everything a kart racing fan would expect but little else, evoking a sense of blandness. Nevertheless, this is a quality racer for anyone craving mascot-karting action.

Reflections: Rare joining forces with Disney? Oh, the possibilities! And it made sense. After all, Mickey is one of the world's most recognized mascots, so a Disney-fueled racer was a no-brainer. Even better, thanks to *Diddy Kong Racing*, Rare already had a viable engine to utilize. It's a wild ride that both kids and adults can enjoy for some fast-paced and silly cartoon antics. Whether chasing the gold solo or bashing other players in Battle, you're in for a journey all across the USA that sure is swell! – DA



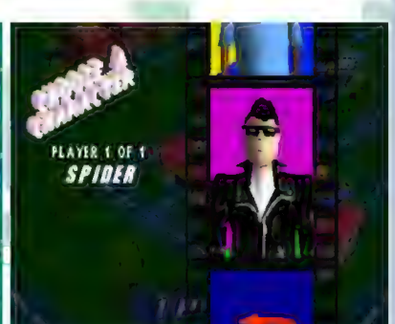
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Micro Machines 64 Turbo

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Codemasters Software
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), Codemasters Software (PAL)
Players: 1-8 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Hit the gas and speed around the house! This micro toy racer's close, top-down perspective keeps the driving action grounded primarily in timing turns, avoiding obstacles, and the occasional jump. An impressive 31 vehicles are featured, ranging from cars and trucks to bomb-lobbing tanks, all in miniaturized form. Drive through 43 courses that build on variations of a simple setting, from cartoonish renderings of a kitchen table to a bright and colorful backyard. Players steer and fire with either the D-pad and L button or the Control Stick and Z-trigger, whichever is more comfortable. The controls are tight, and the frame rate is consistent. Still, the timing of turns can be demanding, so track memorization is of utmost importance. The design of each track and its thematic hazards give each a distinct feel, such as avoiding pool balls on a billiards table or using calculators as ramps and rulers as bridges on a children's activity table. Vehicles also have secondary skills to unleash, such as the tank's explosive ordnance. Additional abilities, like an extendo-claw, can be picked up off the track in power-up parcels. Solo players can enjoy Head-to-Head mode against an AI opponent, race against three in a group of races in Challenge, battle the clock in Time Trial Challenge, or challenge single-track records in Time Trial Single Race. Collectible Prize Cars are awarded for accomplishing goals in each mode. Where the experience truly shines is with friends, however. Standard free-for-all or blue-against-red multiplayer modes can be played in Single Race or Tournament for a wild time. Party Play introduces even more: Time Trial Single Race, Time Trial Tournament, a single-controller hot-seat Knockout mode, and the truly insane Pad Share, where up to eight players use half a controller each. Finally, Keepsies – if multiple players have Controller Pak saves with Prize Cars, they can race those cars competitively, with the winner taking the loser's vehicle! A notable lack of race music is disappointing but not a glaring issue. The simplicity and freneticism make this mini-racing outing a blast at parties.



Reflections: It was great seeing the game series' familiar cartoon racers make appearances again – who doesn't want to be Spider and cruise down the boulevard in a pea-sized convertible? *Micro Machines 64 Turbo*'s most unusual feature is its Pad Share mode, which is a crazy take on multiplayer racing. The N64's unique controller shape manages it well, provided your co-racer has a steady grip. – DG

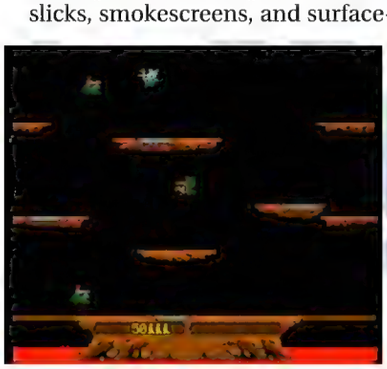
European Cartridge

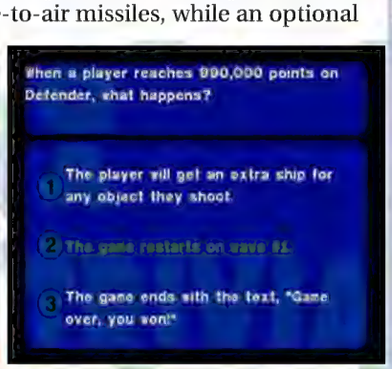
Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits: Volume 1

Genre: Compilation (Action, Shooter)
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA
Dev.: Bally Midway, Marvin Glass and Associates, Vid Kidz, Williams Electronics
Ported by: Digital Eclipse Software
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (alternating, simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

This compilation features ports of six 1980s arcade classics. The colorful *Defender* (Williams Electronics, 1981) is a left-or-right space shooter where the player's ship must blast alien attackers while defending humanoids on the planet's surface. A helpful minimap guides the player, and smart bombs and a hyperspace function are available to help stave off the waves of enemies. *Joust* (Williams Electronics, 1982) is a difficult single-screen action game for one or two simultaneous players. A knight on a flying ostrich must bring down the other ostrich-riding knights by flapping around, colliding with them from above, and collecting the dropped egg before a replacement knight is hatched. The vibrant *Robotron: 2084* (Vid Kidz, 1982) is a single-screen multidirectional shooter where players control Robotron Hero, who must blast waves of robots. This title will challenge the most hardened player, even with nicely adapted twin-stick controls. The cute *Root Beer Tapper* (Marvin Glass and Associates, 1984) features a soda jerk on single-screen stages who must make then sling root beer mugs via bartop to four advancing rows of thirsty patrons. The action stops if a patron reaches the end of a bar without a drink, a returning empty mug slides and crashes on the ground, or a filled mug slides to the end of a bar with no customer. The impressive *Sinistar* (Williams Electronics, 1983) is a free-roaming multidirectional space shooter where the player's spaceship tangles with laser-firing foes and worker ships trying to construct the monstrous Sinistar ("Beware, I live!"). This roaring boss chases after the player ("Run, coward!") and can only be defeated with 13 Sinibombs attained by shooting planetoids. The satisfying *Spy Hunter* (Bally Midway, 1983) is a vertically-scrolling vehicular combat game where the player controls the machine-gunning G-6155 Interceptor. While avoiding innocent motorists, the player must deal with blue-colored road baddies and bomb-dropping helicopters. The Weapons Van can help arm the Interceptor with oil slicks, smokescreens, and surface-to-air missiles, while an optional speedboat segment is available. The faithful arcade representations include saveable high scores, and the N64 controller competently handles the different control schemes. Solid arcade games with standard options and a tacked-on multiple-choice arcade trivia game may be worth a few quarters, but probably not enough to worry about making extra change.

Reflections: That this title appears so late in the Nintendo 64's life is a head-scratcher. Not only does its release come years after similar arcade compilations, like *Williams Arcade's Greatest Hits* and *Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Atari Collection 1*, but *Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits* also doesn't offer any frills or extras to stand out. Even the menu feels lazy, as it has a simple rotation of arcade cabinets to access the games instead of a 3D arcade to walk through – a wasted opportunity. However, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge Digital Eclipse, who has continued to publish quality retro game compilations in modern times, including ones such as *Mega Man Legacy Collection* (2015), *Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection* (2018), and *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration* (2022), which is arguably the best retro game compilation ever produced. – PC





Mike Piazza's Strike Zone

Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 1998
Region: NA
Developer: Devil's Thumb Entertainment
Publisher: GT Interactive Software
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

Hall of Fame catcher Mike Piazza lends his endorsement as the marquee player of a full MLBPA roster to this Major League Baseball simulation. Batting and pitching occur from a behind-the-batter camera while fielding happens from a top-down perspective. The title comes into play when a three-by-three grid appears after every pitch, with the middle red dot indicating the "strike zone" and an icon showing where the ball landed on the grid. While the pitch is in transit, a blue or red streak will hint that the former will land in the strike zone and lead to a better chance of connecting with a base hit, while hitting blue streak balls will likely result in easy fielding outs. The intuitive pitching system is fun to experiment with, and the batting feels similarly natural when mastering when to connect with a swing or bunt. Players can substitute in pinch hitters and rotate fatigued pitchers, adding a layer of strategy to play. Unfortunately, the fielding has a couple of hang-ups, with the primary issue being players lacking hustle when maneuvering around the diamond. These deficiencies can prove costly several times a game when chasing down routine pop-ups and attempting to field a ground ball that appears within reach but suspiciously winds up breezing out of the infield. There are five modes available: exhibitions with one or two players in Single Game, jumping into the postseason in World Series mode, pitting the best American League and National League players against each other in All-Star Game, picking any two MLB sluggers to compete in a Home Run Derby, and playing a short, medium, or full-length MLB schedule in Season mode. A notable feature when selecting teams is using either the 1997 or 1998 rosters, with 1998 including the Tampa Bay Devil Rays and Arizona Diamondbacks expansion teams. Players may want to explore the suite of customization features, as any team or player can be edited, right down to moving the team and changing their uniforms. Amusing idle pitcher and frustrated batter animations remain tucked behind severely lacking and bland graphics. Aurally, delightful organ beats and multiple walk-up themes stay offset by annoying menu music and a sparse announcer. While this release hopes mastering the strike zone would lead to the ultimate pitching endeavor that is a perfect game, it barely survives into the middle innings.

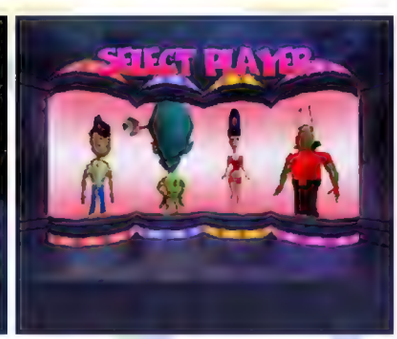
Reflections: The developers may have taken a shot at Nintendo's Ken Griffey Jr. games during Home Run Derby mode. This mode selects Mike Piazza and Ken Griffey Jr. as the default competitors to choose from. Unsurprisingly, this debut entry was the first and last installment in the Strike Zone series. Rest assured, there would be no cover star curse here, as Mike Piazza would become the all-time home run leader for catchers, be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, and don a dashing mullet in commercials for Pert Plus shampoo. – DK

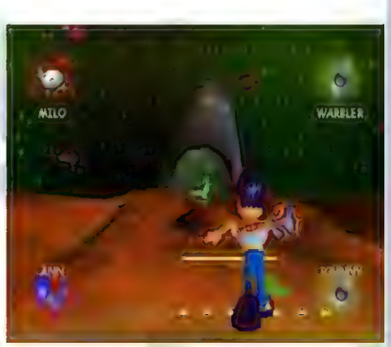
Milo's Astro Lanes

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Player 1
Publisher: Crave Entertainment
Players: 1-4
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Get some bowling action without worrying about public gutter ball shaming in this fantastical, cosmic interpretation of the sport. In the 22nd century, Milo and five of his friends, each with slightly different throwing power and hook skills, bowl against each other in the universally televised Astro Games in a quest to earn coveted prize money. Players can choose between several third-person behind-the-back camera perspectives and a first-person view for each throw. Matches occur across five absurd bowling lanes, including Alien Invasion, where the lane is an extraterrestrial's elongated tongue, or Vacation on Venus, which includes boiling lava and noxious fumes. Each difficulty level evolves lanes with more obstacles to contend with, like jumpable gaps and flying volcanic rocks. Use the D-pad to position the bowler, apply pressure to the Control Stick to determine the strength and angle of a hook, then hit the A button to throw the ball. Power-ups (known here as Specials) can be collected if the ball happens to roll over their hologram on the lane and then later deployed with the Z button. This adds a layer of strategy-like timing, as players need to use Specials like Clone Multiball at just the right moment to separate the ball into three and pick up dastardly splits. Anti-Specials can also be used during a rival's throw. For example, initiating Pea Ball will shrink the opponent's ball so that it barely knocks anything over. There are three core modes, the largest of which is League, which pits a single character against AI-controlled opponents. Practice mode delivers quick training sessions using lanes unlocked in League play. Versus mode lets players bring in up to three of their friends to compete for high-score bragging rights. Levels have a great visual pop with diverse and colorful sci-fi scenery, and the outer space-flavored funk music provides the perfect backdrop. What holds it all back are occasional slowdowns when the graphically intense Specials are too much for the system to handle; moreover, the AI can sometimes be frustratingly aggressive with Anti-Specials. Otherwise, this is a refreshing arcade twist on the sport that should have everyone polishing up their virtual ugly bowling shoes.

Reflections: I have played my fair share of virtual bowling titles, and most are fine, straightforward representations of the sport. *Milo's Astro Lanes* is a definite stand-out from that pack, especially when you find yourself doing things like timing a throw just right to avoid an alien's gigantic, chomping teeth. It was actually slated for a Japanese release by Capcom, where it would have been called *Space Bowler Milo*. However, those plans were eventually scrapped due to the N64's lagging sales in Japan. – DK





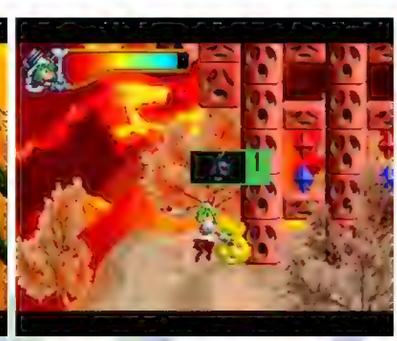
European Cartridge

Mischief Makers

Yuke-Yuke!! Trouble Makers (JP)
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Regions: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Treasure
Publisher: Nintendo (NA, PAL), Enix (JP)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Ultra-InterGalactic-Cybot G Marina Liteyears must shake and toss the Empire on planet Clancer in this personality-rich 2D platformer. Besides genre-staple running and jumping, Marina can dash in any direction using the D-pad or C-buttons or grab onto things using the B button. Held objects can be shaken or thrown, which is a versatile mechanic and can be used in several ways, from shaking Gems loose from enemies to throwing foes' projectiles back at them. This deceptively simple move set pairs wonderfully with the stages; the design starts simple but quickly injects a heavy dose of puzzle-like sleuthing, exercising players' problem-solving skills as much as their ability to jump, dash, and throw. Levels are completed when the player finds and grabs the blue Warp Star, whether at the end of the stage or spawned when the player completes some task, such as rescuing Clancer children. Colorful gems found in stages restore health or are used as currency to buy hints from Ms. Hint or health, lives, and continues when Marina's health bar is fully depleted. Levels are short but creatively designed with unique mechanics, from riding a rocket in an auto-scroller to hunting around a festival to discover warp points. Stages are timed, and the player receives a letter grade based on the speed of completion. Well-scripted boss battles await at the end of each ten-stage track, while simpler mini-bosses lurk in earlier stages along the way. Some Clancers can be talked to with the R button, revealing clues about what to do next. The rendered assets are colorful and distinct, and the occasional rotation, depth effect, and zoom can mix up the feel. The sound effects and music are decent, if somewhat repetitive, but the digitized voices sprinkled throughout are a nice treat. While the journey isn't very long, exploring for secrets can take multiple sessions. The replay value comes from those willing to backtrack and recover all the hidden gold gems for the true ending or race to complete stages with A-grade times. Even with its brevity, this treasure of a title has a charm for young and old players.

Reflections: "Shake, shake!" *Mischief Makers* was the first of three Treasure N64 titles and the only one to get a release outside of Japan. The developer known for its creative Sega releases (*Gunstar Heroes*, *Alien Soldier*, etc.) debuted on Nintendo with a game ideally suited for a family-friendly console. The playful intro is too good to skip, and the personable Beastectors are right from a Saturday morning cartoon. Earning gems on the end-stage bosses (by not getting hit) is particularly challenging, requiring both learning their choreography and executing on some tight timing windows. Still, it's a satisfying triumph of both the mind and reflexes to nab that yellow crystal. While not entirely unknown, *Mischief Makers* is surely one of the console's most overlooked games. – DG

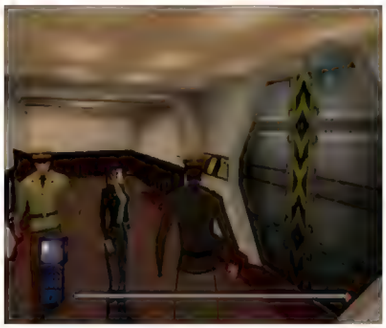


European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

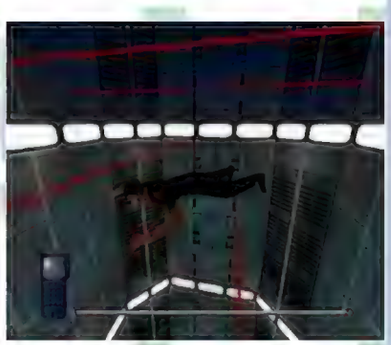
Mission: Impossible

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: July 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Infogrames Europe
Publisher: Ocean Software (NA), Infogrames (PAL)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



This third-person action-adventure based on the 1996 movie features the player as Ethan Hunt, a secret agent for Impossible Missions Force (IMF). Armed with a bevy of gadgets from explosives to darts, stun guns, and disguises, the player must smartly use all of them to take down the evil terrorists. Five stages send Ethan and the team on missions where they strategically (or recklessly) blow up submarines, infiltrate an embassy soiree, and engage in shootouts on speeding trains. A lit fuse represents Ethan's health bar. The mission is over when it depletes or if an objective fails. Radar is always on screen to show essential items, intel, and characters that help to move the mission forward, so there's no chance of forgetting what comes next. Level designs are a high point of the experience. For example, the embassy party mission has Ethan drugging and assuming the host's identity to gain access to the secured levels. During this, he must both take out an assassin at the dinner and poison the host to steal his persona using IMF's patented Face-Maker. Placing smoke bombs in vents is also needed for the escape, and the team dons firefighter outfits to get out unnoticed. The controls undermine this secret agent fun. Item menus are unusually precise and poorly implemented, meaning a fumble selecting something can result in being caught or killed. Some platforming jumps required to complete levels are also frustrating to pull off. Graphically, the overall package is pretty sparse, with few decorations to catch the eye, though the unique design of the stages keeps the visuals from feeling dull. The *Mission: Impossible* theme is shoehorned in as much as possible, and the same death scream is applied to all characters, making the audio experience somewhat repetitive. Missions offer decent replayability through multiple difficulty levels, with higher ones adding more objectives to the stages. If that's not compelling, cheat codes are handed out for perfect runs and let players toggle special features like a big head mode or unlimited health. Suffer through the awkward controls; this is one mission (should you choose to accept it) players won't find impossible.

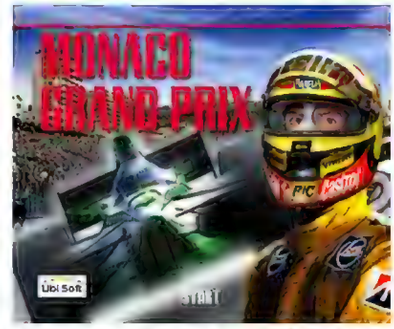
Reflections: Tom Cruise is synonymous with the 1996 film that reignited the franchise; his likeness is nowhere to be found, though, which is a bit of a head-scratcher. I'm not sure it would register if his face were in the game, anyway – the model heads are blocky, lack detail, and often look flat-out weird. *Mission: Impossible* has glaring similarities with Rare's secret agent classic *GoldenEye 007*, as it has similar shooting controls (while botching them, sadly) and even has a boat stage similar to the tank one in *GoldenEye*. Fortunately, this game doesn't take itself too seriously, making forgiving transgressions like that easy. Oh, and yes, the laser shaft bungee scene does appear in the game. – JE



European Cartridge

Monaco Grand Prix

Monaco Grand Prix: Racing Simulation 2 (EU)
Racing Simulation: Monaco Grand Prix (UK)
Racing Simulation 2 (GER)
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ubi Soft Paris Studios
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



This Formula One racer's fine-tuned simulation and career elements will appeal to those wanting a realistic driving experience. However, its dogged focus on realism makes it challenging. The default racing view is from the car's cockpit, but six additional third-person-overhead angles from different zoom levels are also available. The controls and handling are responsive but realistic – attempting a hard right or hard left turn driving at full speed will cause drivers to spin out, like a real F1 car. While it lacks a license for real-life drivers, the tracks and sponsors are here; it feels so much more real when crashing into Bridgestone and Castrol banners instead of generic ones. Also, players can edit and save all racer and team names if they need to insert 1998 and 1999 Drivers' Champion Mika Häkkinen. The meat of the title comes in the Simulation races, highlighted by Career Mode. In this, players start with a two- or three-star racing team, and if they gain points from top-ten finishes, they get offers to join better teams with upgraded cars. Simulation also features Single Race, Time Attack, and Championship modes, each with customizable cars, allowing trade-offs like a smaller fuel tank for more acceleration or better brakes to reduce the need for a better tire. Much like an actual F1 race, it is easy to wipe out if taking a corner at high speed or bumping into one of the other 21 drivers on the course. All races are intense, with a low margin for error, since a single crash or spinout can eliminate any chance of catching back up to the pack. Even with a slew of other cars on the track, there isn't any noticeable slowdown, and the graphics are crisp. It is essential for success to tinker with facets like tire traction and fuel-tank size to optimize performance during the 15-to-30-lap marathon races, taking as much as 30 to 90 minutes of real-time. Arcade Mode lowers the difficulty by eliminating most penalties and reducing the laps per race to three, but the high-wire speed and resulting toughness remain. Arcade and Simulation modes also offer head-to-head, split-screen races. This is a quality experience for those looking for split-second reaction time and managing a racecar while simulating the endurance needed for an actual race.

Reflections: The Dreamcast and PC versions of *Monaco Grand Prix* add extra features, like the ability to customize the races played in the championship circuit. The most confusing aspect of this game is its name. It was known as *Monaco Grand Prix: Racing Simulation 2* and other name variants in different parts of Europe. *Racing Simulation 1*, also known as *F1 Racing Simulation*, was released in Europe for the PC in 1997 and in North America in 1998, but not for consoles. Thus, it would have been a sequel for a game that didn't previously exist on the platform. The follow-up is *F1 Racing Championship*, abandoning both naming conventions. – SG

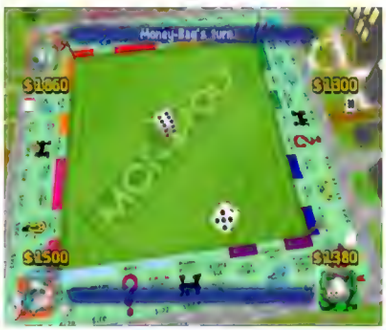
European Cartridge
Monaco Grand Prix: Racing Simulation 2

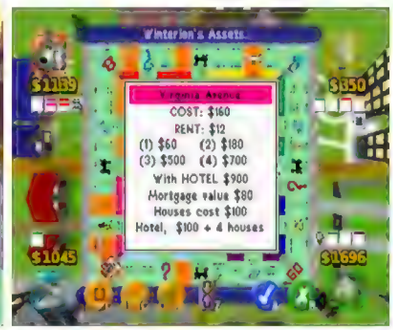
German Cartridge
Racing Simulation 2

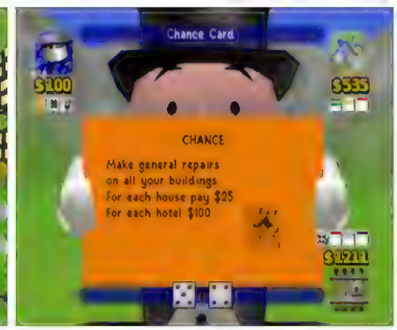
UK Cartridge
Racing Simulation: Monaco Grand Prix

Monopoly

Genre: Board Game
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Minds Eye Productions
Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Players: 1-4
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆







It's the classic real estate-trading board game! Up to four players take turns rolling, moving, and strategically buying properties across a 3D rendition of the classic board, all in a bid to bankrupt the other players. Taking other players' money is done by purchasing properties – owning a property forces others who land on it to pay rent. Holding all properties of one color (a monopoly of two or three) unlocks the ability to build houses and hotels, making these spaces nightmares for opponents. In addition to the traditional setup, Short Game randomly purchases three properties for each player, makes hotels easier to complete, and awards victory to the richest player when someone is eliminated. Timed Game lets players set a timer, randomly gives two properties to each player to purchase, and declares the richest player winner after the time expires. Computer opponents come in four AI variations when friends are in short supply, though their differences seem minimal. Most of them spare no expense in winning auctions or acquiring monopolies, making them vulnerable to exploitation. For variety, 11 playing pieces, like the car, top hat, and boot, have unique movement patterns, sound effects, and animations. Players get a close-up view of these pieces while moving, while the rest of the action takes place from a more strategic top-down view. Mr. Monopoly functions as a facilitator, holding up Community Chest and Chance cards and managing auctions. During play, each player's cash on hand and owned properties are displayed on the corners of the screen. Distinct button icons appear when player input is needed, with symbols signifying what each does. These visual indicators can help with complex actions, like trading properties with other players. Neither the simple music loop nor the board's suburban surroundings add much, but the cartoonish artistic direction works well. It would have been nice to allow players to speed up dice rolls, as the high arc of tosses quickly feels like a time-waster. Piece-moving sounds are also a bit irritating, but the animations can be disabled. The array of variant and house rules that can be toggled to customize play is fantastic, as is the British localization that changes locale names and currency. This edition could use a more aesthetic polish but is feature-rich enough that fans of the board game should enjoy it nonetheless.

Reflections: The name "Monopoly" and the Atlantic City property names came from Charles Darrow, whose version was just one of many iterations of Elizabeth Magie's *The Landlord's Game*. A believer in Georgist economic theory, her design sought to demonstrate the detrimental consequences of land grabbing. Parker Brothers paid Darrow for his edition first, eventually making him the first millionaire game designer. Magie only received $500 for her patent, which Parker Brothers purchased after Darrow's to shore up their legal claim to the title. Only *Monopoly* could have an origin story so rooted in aggressive acquisition and unequal outcomes! Still, the game endures, with each generation getting new versions to enjoy. Disclaimer: No friendships were harmed in the making of this review. – DG

Monster Truck Madness 64

Genre: Racing
Release Date: June 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Terminal Reality
Ported by: Edge of Reality
Publisher: Rockstar Games
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

This off-road racer brings big monster truck dreams to the N64, featuring 19 trucks, including mon-stars like Grave Digger and Bigfoot, plus trucks themed to WCW wrestlers like Sting and Hollywood Hogan. In the core mode, players race other trucks, with exhibition races being quick and customizable and circuit races being the serious single-player mode with greater difficulty. Besides racing, battle modes add variety, including soccer and hockey, where the trucks push a ball/puck, chase, tag, and Summit Rumble, where players fight to stay atop a platform. Ten tracks are spread across rough, sprawling off-road settings with hills, water, snow, bridges, winding paths, trees, and more, making uniquely explorable racing environments. Impressive weather, time of day, and light-sourcing effects enhance the landscapes, including a challenging mode where only the headlights illuminate the stage. Fortunately, the camera controls are good, complete with a first-person cockpit and behind-the-car views. Power-ups throughout the courses enliven gameplay like a diamond that grants invisibility, a super-jump spring, and missiles. Seven tracks are initially available, while three are unlockable through circuit races. There's a code system for saving progress. The trucks look great, but all feel the same – awkward. Although the design is fantastical, the handling is realistic, which paradoxically feels accurate but isn't harmonious with the fun atmosphere. Getting used to the ungainly trucks can be challenging or likely frustrating, with the top-heavy trucks frequently tipping and flipping (mercifully, they instantly right themselves without penalty). On some tracks, it is easy to fall off course, which all but guarantees losing since maneuvering back on track might take too long to catch up with computer opponents. The controls aren't as problematic when playing with friends since everyone is equally handicapped. Alas, it turns out that getting to drive a monster truck means having to drive a monster truck.

Reflections: You could play *Rocket League* on the N64 all along! And who doesn't enjoy giant trucks? I saw the monster truck rally television ads in the '90s and was interested but I never went. The closest I got was in Baton Rouge a few years ago. I was there for a professional conference, and while walking back to my hotel in the evening, I passed a sports arena and heard unmistakable motor noise from outside. A side door was open, and I caught a short glimpse of a truck coming down a dirt hill. I wanted to stop and look but, sadly, knew I had to keep walking. At least *Monster Truck Madness 64* can kind of fill that gap in my life. – KN

European Cartridge

Morita Shōgi 64

Genre: Board Game
Release Date: Apr. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Internal Modem (optional)
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆

Veteran shōgi video game programmer Kazurō Morita helms development and lends his name to the title of SETA's second shōgi entry on the N64. Shōgi is a Japanese version of the board game chess. From a top-down 2D camera, each player's pieces are laid out on the top and bottom three rows of a grid-pattern board. Players take turns moving and capturing each other's forces. Shōgi combines familiar chess units like pawns, bishops, and rooks with those exclusive to shōgi, like lances, silver generals, and gold generals. The goal remains the same – put the opponent's king piece into a checkmate by making it impossible for them to move without being captured. What differentiates shōgi from traditional chess is that when a player captures their opponent's pieces, those eliminated units can be saved and later dropped by the capturer nearly anywhere on the board under their command. Furthermore, when a player's piece reaches the opposite three end rows of the board, they are promoted, allowing them greater ranges of movement. These twists to the chess formula open up new strategies and paths to victory. Players can select the Shōgi Ranking Test option to play a series of test matches and questions presented to them to earn a ranking and certificate letter of their rated skill level. Research Room mode is an open practice mode, Shōgi Problems is a scenario mode for players to tackle specific situational challenges, and Game Room enables single rounds against the computer or a friend. Customization options are available to adjust the CPU difficulty level, countdown timer, time limit on turns, or ability to save mid-game and finish later. Upon its original release, players could attach a landline phone cord directly to a modem port in the cartridge to connect to servers and play online. The simple 2D assets and playfield visuals will not win any awards, but two patterns of pieces and boards are available for a modicum of variety. Voiced play-by-play of each move and relaxing background music highlight the audio. Shōgi enthusiasts will find it a proper playing rendition of the board game, but the lack of a tutorial option and any single-player tournament/career mode make this a difficult title to recommend highly.

Reflections: Online play and a marginally improved presentation package are the noticeable differences over *Saikyō Habu Shōgi*, SETA's launch title for the N64. Unfortunately, that does not make up for this sequel not carrying over the previous title's much-appreciated tutorial and tournament modes. While some N64 Disk Drive entries contain online-specific features and options, *Morita Shōgi 64* receives the unique distinction of being the only N64 game to have online play. While the official servers have been long inactive, there has been a recent resurgence in the N64 mod community to take advantage of the cartridge's phone port and make online homebrew gaming possible on the system. – DK

Mortal Kombat 4

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: June 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Games
Ported by: Eurocom Developments
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-8 (2 simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Elder God Shinnok has escaped from the Netherrealm with the help of sorcerer Quan Chi, and Thunder God Raiden has recruited warriors to finish him in this continuation of the fighting series. Combat is one-on-one timed rounds, best of three, with the opportunity to execute opponents via Fatality when winning a second round. Shared moves to drain or preserve life bars consist of high and low kicks, high and low punches, blocks, throws, and running, which can be used to maneuver or to set up attacks. Each of the 18 characters has unique special moves, like tapping Down, Forward, and Low Punch to throw Jax's fireball. Combos, which are chained high-damage attacks, also return. Thankfully, they have been toned down and cannot take 100 percent of an opponent's life bar like previously. The perspective is mostly 2D, but characters can now sidestep into the foreground or background with a single button press to avoid projectiles. Players can also use weapons. Tapping Forward, Forward, High Kick as Scorpion results in him unsheathing a broadsword from, well, somewhere on his body. Unfortunately, the weapons and stage effects – boulders that can be thrown at opponents, for example – are hampered in their effectiveness because of their slow speed. Like previous entries, the 18 characters are mostly differentiated by look, backstory, and special moves. All regular characters have the same strength and speed stats, with only the secret character, Goro, being bulkier and slower but stronger. As a result, combat comes down to knowing how to counter special moves used by the opponent. Combat feels balanced and simplified. Each character only has two Fatalities (gory match-ending moves), but the previous entries' Babality, Brutality, Animality, and Friendship finishers are gone. The difficulty and learning curve is reasonable, and a new Practice Mode allows players to perfect timing for specials. Besides standard Arcade, a two-on-two Team is available (one teammate at a time fights until both are eliminated). Tournament Mode allows up to 8 players to participate by taking turns with two controllers or filling out the brackets with computer opponents. The look has changed, shifting from digitized motion capture footage of the past to 3D polygonal graphics. Between the new graphics and combat difficulty that feels less focused on sucking quarters from an arcade player, this is a competent console brawler.

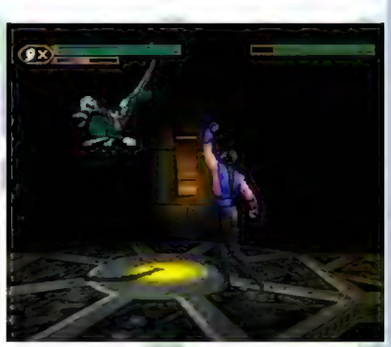
Reflections: According to interviews with series co-creator Ed Boon, *Mortal Kombat 4* saw the series shed its more comical elements as it transitioned into partially 3D gameplay. Console versions helped to repair some of the damage done by the arcade release, which initially shipped without character endings and game-breaking bugs. The graphics of the N64 version are boxier compared to the PC and PS1 versions, but playability is the same. *Mortal Kombat Gold*, a launch title for the Dreamcast about two years later, adds six characters and is the best version of this game, but it pales in direct comparison to other fighting games of that era. – SG

European Cartridge

Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero

Genre: Action-Adventure, Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Avalanche Software
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆

Control Bi-Han, the original Sub-Zero, as he searches for a magical amulet in this prequel to the original *Mortal Kombat* arcade fighter. Players beat up enemies and deal with deadly pits and traps in this 2D combat-oriented side-scrolling title. Sub-Zero starts with a basic move set of punches and kicks, but defeating the mostly single enemies will award him experience, unlocking special abilities such as freezing enemies and creating ice clones. Controlling Sub-Zero is a chore. Pressing UP on the D-pad makes him jump, and since he cannot be directed while airborne, landing on moving platforms becomes a nightmare. To make matters worse, players must press the B button to turn Sub-Zero instead of simply pressing the D-pad in the desired direction. The controls make fighting enemies cumbersome and overly difficult. A health bar is located at the top of the screen, along with a regenerating ice meter that depletes when using ice abilities. Throughout Sub-Zero's journey, he will locate keys, items to boost his health and strength, and even power-ups for limited invincibility or invisibility. Pressing the Z button will display Sub-Zero's inventory and any unlocked special moves. The visuals feature digitized actors and some impressive rotating and scaling effects. Unfortunately, the environments, ranging from mountainsides and temples to sewers, are unimaginative and uninteresting. Stages are maze-like and require backtracking after locating specific keys to open doors. Several leaps of faith are necessary when platforming since the terrible level design positions several platforms off-screen. Many traps are also out of sight, making gameplay feel downright unfair. Enemy variety is severely lacking. Players will fight the same monk sprite (sometimes multiples) hundreds of times. Scorpion, Sareena, and a few other characters from the franchise make very brief appearances. The story, told through images and text, settles for stills from the PlayStation version's full-motion video clips. This compromise is disappointing, especially since they also omit some sequences entirely. This mythically bad footnote in the Mortal Kombat series, attempting to combine beat 'em up, fighting, and platforming genres, should be avoided at all costs.

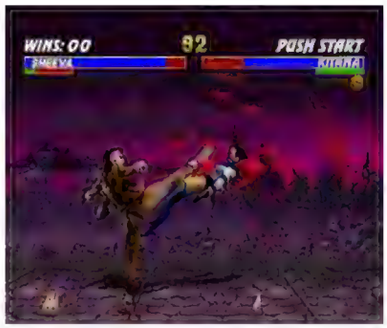


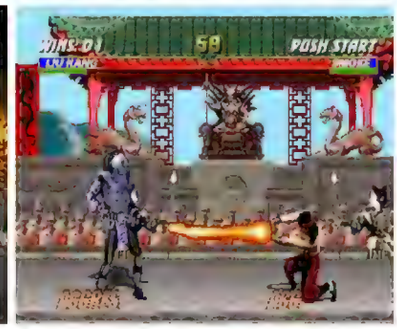
Reflections: I purchased *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero* for the PlayStation as a teen and regretted it as soon as I pressed the power button. In theory, the concept of *Mythologies* sounds amazing. I expected a beat-em-up with pulse-pounding one-on-one battles, each ending in a gory fatality. What I got was one of the worst platformers I've ever played. The jumping is atrocious, the backtracking is tiresome, and the fighting is cumbersome and boring. You need to press a button just to turn around! Who would have thought fighting in a Mortal Kombat game would be boring? I hate it! – MV

European Cartridge

Mortal Kombat Trilogy

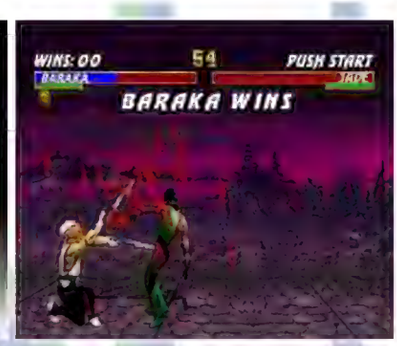
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Games
Publisher: Williams Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: None
Availability: Common
☆☆☆





After losing in the previous fighting tournament, evil Outworld emperor Shao Kahn launches a full-on effort to conquer Earth in this update to *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*. Gameplay consists of a series of timed one-on-one, side-view, best-of-three combat rounds where nearly 30 motion-captured characters pummel one another to the death. Basic maneuvers for all characters include high/low punches and kicks, aerial and running variations of each, throws, and blocks. Excluding bosses, these moves have the same strength from character to character. Special moves are executed by controller button sequences, like Johnny Cage's Shadow Kick (Back, Forward, Low Kick) or Rayden's Flying Dive (Back, Back, Forward). Players can also launch Combos, which are unblockable chained attacks that take away 15-40% of an opponent's life bar. Most combat moves result in gushes of blood flying from opponents. When an opponent is defeated, pressing the right combination of buttons causes scripted Fatality executions, like Kitana's kiss that causes their foe to explode or Jax growing 40 feet tall and stomping an enemy with a boot. (It is left unsaid why fighters don't use these fantastic powers earlier.) Brutalities – a finishing move of dozens of hits – also debuts, accompanying other enders like Babalities, Friendships, and Animalities. Stages with environmental effects – like being able to uppercut an opponent through the ceiling – add to the style and shock value but don't change the smooth and violent combat. While there are 28 characters (26 plus two bosses), some are palette swaps with different special moves. This is a tough battle. Winning on difficulties above novice sometimes feels like a matter of luck, not an execution of skill. Unskippable endurance fights, requiring players to beat two characters in a round instead of one, worsen matters. The multiplayer experience is much better, with options like an eight-player tournament and two-on-two and three-on-three battles offering variety for a group of friends. Ultimately, though, this fighting spectacle is entertaining, if frustrating.

Reflections: *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* was the first fighting game for the N64, beating *Killer Instinct Gold* by a few weeks. Quite fitting, too, as the Mortal Kombat series was still riding high at the time: nine games released from 1992 to 2000 on 17 different platforms, along with two movies, a card game, animated and live-action TV shows, and even a live stage show. *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* has an odd tone dissonance, however. One minute, you're fighting for your life as the deathly serious monk Liu Kang, then executing a meta Fatality where you drop an arcade cabinet on a foe. Some of this is legitimately entertaining, but plenty of it is corny, especially sillier aspects like Babalities. In addition, this particular version of the game features muddier sound and fewer characters than its PS1, PC, and Saturn counterparts. – SG



European Cartridge

NA "-1" Variant Cartridge

MRC: Multi-Racing Championship

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Aug. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Genki
Publisher: Ocean Software (NA, PAL), Imagineer (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

The worlds of dirt and asphalt driving combine in this racing mash-up. Choose from one of eight unlicensed on- or off-road vehicles (plus two unlockable rides) to compete in first- or third-person camera perspectives. Each machine has seven categories of settings to customize before the race, such as adjusting brake sensitivity or optimizing tires for specific road conditions. Other categories worth testing are adjustable settings for tight or loose steering and soft or hard suspension for enabling the best performance out of each vehicle. All this experimenting in the garage is time well spent, resulting in an immersive racing experience when smoothly navigating tight turns and staying competitive at the front of the pack. Setting lap records in Time Trial and/or the solo-practice Free Run modes are recommended for training so players can hang with the nine AI opponents during race time. There are three themed tracks: mountain, seaside, and downtown, with all three having optional dirt and paved routes that split off from each other throughout the track. The various routes open up all kinds of strategies for those daring to mix and match, but it is best to keep off-road vehicles on dirt paths and vice versa for on-road vehicles. While three tracks are not much, each has options to close off dirt or paved paths for different experiences, and mirrored versions can be unlocked after finishing both primary single-player modes. Championship mode has drivers competing for first place on all levels, and doing so opens up Match Race mode, which is a one-on-one clash with the two unlockable supercars on each course. Beating each car three times unlocks both vehicles and the mirrored stages. Vs. Race is the only multiplayer mode where two players can challenge each other in a one-on-one duel. The high-performance rides look great in action while kicking up dirt and burning concrete, while the three tracks are filled with lively scenery like sprinting deer and hot-air balloons. An upbeat techno score provides fitting driving beats, while a muted announcer alerts of upcoming tight turns and sometimes scolds players when lagging behind. While this racer looks and plays well, the lack of tracks and multiplayer options severely hurt its lasting appeal.

Reflections: I really appreciate the concept of what *MRC* brings to the table by mixing both styles of road driving. I found better overall performance by sticking with the dirt routes on each stage. While tweaking the settings of a few preferred cars just right worked wonders for me. If this only had more courses and multiplayer offerings, it would have emerged as one of the top racing games in the N64 library. At least I can find solace here in including a racing game trope I can always appreciate – a hidden shortcut behind a waterfall. – DK

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Ms. Pac-Man: Maze Madness

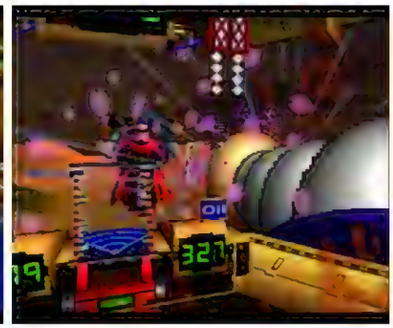
Genre: Maze
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Namco Hometek
Ported by: Mass Media
Publisher: Namco Hometek
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

The first lady of gaming returns for more mazes and chases, this time seeking Pac-Land's four sacred "Gems of Virtue" before a malicious witch nabs them. Much has changed since the globular star's frantic arcade days. Players are still tasked with running around an assortment of overhead labyrinths and gobbling every "Pac-Dot" they encounter on the way to finding the exit. Exploration and puzzle-solving are now the chief directives. The quarter-munching diversion has been expanded into a 15-stage adventure. The missus now must use her mind as much as her munching mouth as she searches four mystical locales, from the Egyptian-esque Cleopactra to the eerie halls of Haunted Halloween. This might mean shoving a block to fill an impassable gap, stepping across a series of switches to open a new path, using a TNT block to blow up something to clear a path, or using a key to free some hidden fruit. Wisely, the control scheme retains its old-school pedigree: only the D-pad or Control Stick is needed to perform Ms. Pac-Man's many actions, thereby preserving the original's intuitive nature despite the revised cerebral design. A handy radar simplifies matters even further, pivoting perpetually towards the nearest allotment of dots. Of course, those roving colored ghosts are also back, along with corridor-filling centipedes, lunging Hellhounds, and other manic miscreants looking to harass the heroine. And like before, gulping a Power Pellet power-up grants the adventurer brief invincibility and a chance to chomp her pursuers. It's not all about merely reaching the end of stages, though – epic boss encounters, time trial challenges, and a gamut of quasi-optional side quests inject some depth into an otherwise breezy experience. Thanks to a generous life bar, the maiden is amazingly resilient, a fact punctuated by levels overrun with health refills and extra lives. These concessions are all but necessary considering the gameplay design's penchant for cheap hits; a myopic camera and touchy controls are the most resounding foes. Multiplayer contests are available (Ghost Tag, Dot Mania, Da Bomb), as is the original classic *Ms. Pac-Man*. However, having that present is a reminder that this "madness" is an inventive but iffy reimagining of a perfect arcade title.

Reflections: Alas, *Ms. Pac-Man: Maze Madness* is a good game – when not played on the N64. The PlayStation version features a catchy, uncompromised soundtrack, stable frame rate, and even six additional stages. But this poor man's conversion, despite retaining the same graphical charm and quizzical fervor of its source material, offers a decidedly inferior experience. Why? Sources say the N64 version is not a true port but rather a creaky emulation of the original engine. It's still serviceable, but the PlayStation and Dreamcast editions simply treat the lady better. – DA

Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon

Ganbare Goemon: Neo Momoyama Bakufu no Odori (JP)
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Apr. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆



All the world's a stage, unless Goemon and friends can stop the mysterious Peach Mountain Shoguns from transforming Japan into a medieval theatre! Take control of Goemon, Ebisumaru, Sasuke, and Yae in this third-person 3D action-adventure across feudal Japan. Robotic foes stylized after creatures in Japanese folklore roam the varied rural highways, mountain passes, and dangerous dungeons. Story beats and conversations with townspeople help players know what to pursue next, as progress in the otherwise open world depends on completing tasks ranging from rescuing a dragon to finding a quality cucumber. Each character has unique weapons and abilities to help, like Goemon's Chain Pipe or Sasuke's Fire Cracker Bomb. Mini-game Training Stages throughout the journey unlock Magic Powers, such as Ebisumaru's shrinking or Yae's mermaid transformation. These are key to reaching otherwise inaccessible areas. Bonus items like Fortune Dolls encourage exploration through the stages, which increase the player's maximum strength. However, imperfect camera controls make finding hidden items harder, hitting enemies with ranged attacks, or traversing trickier platforming segments. Shops sell protective gear and strength-replenishing food, though the player's money can also be spent in combat, as ranged attacks use currency as ammo. Dungeons are filled with enemies and feature complex layouts with locked doors, though discoverable items can reveal the map of rooms and the boss's location. Boss battles are primarily about dodging incoming salvos and finding chances to counter-attack or expose a weak point with the right ability. Periodically in the story, Goemon and friends call for the aid of their giant robot, Impact. These stages begin with a high-speed, auto-scrolling runner where the player must smash buildings and foes while jumping over obstacles. The better the player does, the more ammo and health they have for the first-person battle that follows. Here, the player must deflect attacks and use button combinations to unleash punches, kicks, and lasers, reducing the enemy's gauge to zero before their own. The polygonal graphics effectively match the cartoonish presentation, and the music is catchy and enjoyable. A laugh track even sneaks into some dialog, adding to the goofy aesthetic. From the first beats of the intro's opening number to the closing credits, the bevy of creative touches makes this not-so-serious adventure seriously worth going on.

Reflections: The Goemon series oozes charm in its madcap scenarios and playful dialog, from talking dogs to the "PLASMA!"-exclaiming Fortune Teller. The theme of having unwanted Western transformations really works for a series so rich in its cultural references, and the soundtrack leans into it with its great composition and instrument choice. The loss of multiplayer is a letdown. Still, it would have also required serious refactoring to the level design. Fans of Legend of Zelda-style adventures will be rewarded with an equally exciting mix of overworld travel, well-crafted dungeons, and memorable battles. – DG

European Cartridge

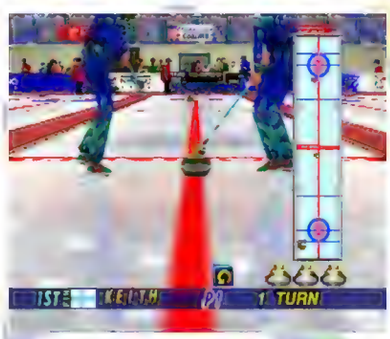
Japanese Cartridge
Ganbare Goemon: Neo Momoyama Bakufu no Odori

Nagano Winter Olympics '98

Hyper Olympics in Nagano (JP)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

This collection of sports mini-games is the only multi-event Winter Olympics title to grace the N64. A dozen Olympic events are available to play; each takes place in 3D with a third-person camera following just behind the action. Two modes provide a slight variation in goals: Olympic Mode features events to rack up medals, while Championship Mode is a points-driven competition similar to a decathlon. Choose the mode, pick one of 16 nations, and get geared up for a lukewarm sporting experience. Skiing and snowboarding take conservative use of the analog stick to master, where one twitch can send the athlete crashing. Pulling stunts on the half-pipe requires completing a series of quick-time events where pressing the right button at the right time is the only real goal. Hopping on the four-person bobsleigh can be fun, but it only lasts about 60 seconds – tap left a couple of times, tap right a couple of times, and the finish line appears. Luge is essentially the same as bobsleigh, just solo. Speed skating utilizes only the shoulder buttons and encourages the establishment of a steady rhythm instead of just mashing buttons. The highlights of this collection are ski jumping and curling. In the former, players must consider elements like the launch angle before taking to the air, and each jump requires precision when landing. In the puzzle-like curling, sliding the stone down the ice and trying to knock the other team's stone out of the paint is surprisingly satisfying. Immediately after competing in an event, the player gets an instant replay of the run. Thanks to the detailed graphics, it looks sharp, so there is much to enjoy from revisiting the action. The audio accompaniment is another valuable part of the experience. There is little music outside the menus, but during events, a subdued cheering from fans gradually rises when a medal is within reach. Unfortunately, after mastering an event, there is little reason to play it again, as they rely on quick reflexes rather than a thoughtful depth to the gameplay. This sporting contest does provide a few pleasant moments with its audiovisual package, and a couple of the events are genuinely entertaining, but the overall experience is not medal-worthy.

Reflections: This ultimately forgettable sports game tries to keep players distracted by paying tribute to some of Konami's more well-respected franchises. I first noticed this when Alucard bested me in downhill, and I later fell a stride short to M. Gear when competing in speed skating. I guess those guys have hobbies, too, right? Fans of other popular properties may also be pleasantly surprised. Watch out for C. Wiggum when you make your way to the curling sheet. That guy is a beast with the stone. – KS



European Cartridge

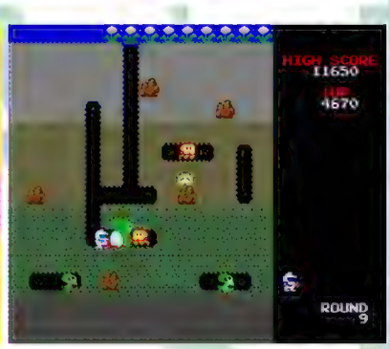
Japanese Cartridge
Hyper Olympics in Nagano

Namco Museum 64

Genre: Compilation (Action, Maze, Racing, Shooter)
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Namco
Ported by: Mass Media
Publisher: Namco Hometek
Players: 1-2
Features: Controller Pak Save, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

There is no need to have pockets full of quarters to play this compilation of six Namco arcade classics! From the main menu, players can select one of the available titles. The famous *Pac-Man* (1980) and his female counterpart sequel, *Ms. Pac-Man* (1982), are single-screen maze games where the yellow, pie-shaped munchers must chomp every pellet on each screen while avoiding four colored ghosts. Pac and Ms. can turn the tables via power pellets to try to eat their chasers for a limited time, and they can snack on tasty fruit for a bonus. The fixed space shooter *Galaxian* (1979) and its sequel *Galaga* (1981) have the player's ship at the screen's bottom moving left and right while firing on formations of attacking aliens. Galaxian limits the spaceship to a single shot at a time for battling insectoids. The more colorful and advanced Galaga allows two shots at a time against the circling enemy waves and the ability to have a dual fighter by rescuing a captured ship from a Boss Galaga. The influential third-person racer *Pole Position* (1982) tasks the player to qualify their Formula One car in a single-lap time trial before taking on a three-lap challenge. Time must be extended by reaching lap checkpoints while shifting between low and high gears and avoiding road signs and the other racers, lest the race car explode. The cute *Dig Dug* (1982) has the titular hero digging horizontally and vertically underground to avoid and kill Pookas and Fygars by cartoonishly popping them with a pump or crushing them with rocks. Each single-screen stage may look simple, but a deeper strategy is involved. Games are recreated faithfully in both gameplay and audiovisual quality, and pretty side overlay art from the original arcade cabinets fills in the voids left by the vertical displays. However, controlling Pac and Ms. Pac with the D-pad or Control Stick versus a traditional 4-way joystick may take getting used to, and the Control Stick may feel like an iffy substitute for a *Pole Position* steering wheel. Dip switch settings for each game are mainly available for altering bonus and extra life tiers and the default lives available. Helpful gameplay tips are offered, but no other extras are available. However, experiencing some excellent classics from the golden age of arcade games may be more than enough.

Reflections: Namco was arguably the king of arcade games in the 1980s, with dozens of quality titles and major franchises produced. These quarter eaters were fun and featured colorful mascot characters and revolutionary gaming mechanics that set gaming standards and helped define entire game genres. Pound for pound, Namco arcade compilations are probably the safest bet for replaying those outstanding games of yesteryear that were largely responsible for shaping the video game industry as we know it today. – PC



NASCAR 2000

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Stormfront Studios
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

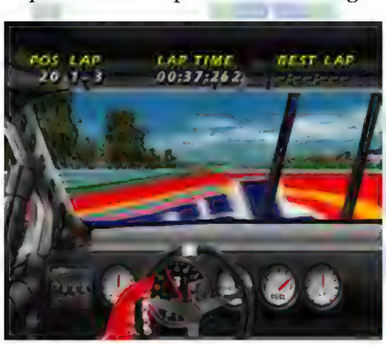
The NASCAR experience returns to the N64 with 40 real-world drivers, including Dale Earnhardt, Jeff Gordon, and legends like Richard Petty, 18 tracks modeled on real-life raceways, and audio commentary from NASCAR announcers Benny Parsons and Bob Jenkins. The gameplay is focused on racing against other stock cars in a third-person perspective from behind the bumper, though players can toggle to a first-person view to race from the cockpit. Since the controls are adjustable and solid, players can feel the constant relief cycle on straightaways and pressure braking on curves. Players can choose a quick race, single race, or championship from the main menu. The former are simple one-off races, while the latter is a career mode consisting of 19 races that can be saved and loaded with a Controller Pak. Tracks have unique skies and landscapes, yet they still look similar to each other. Some might have parked cars or an RV camp in the center of the track, but the textures are so compressed as to be barely identifiable. The fade-in effect of oncoming buildings and bleachers is distracting because everything seems to materialize too suddenly. However, the cars are the real stars; they look accurate, even showing dents and smoke. A variety of customization options are available. Damage can be disabled, but when it is active, steering clear of the walls on turns, avoiding other cars, and knowing when to use the pit becomes essential. Players can change a car's setup from the ground up, including rear spoiler, tire pressure, gear ratios, and more, allowing casual arcade controls or a more accurate simulation experience. The race length, physics, damage, opponents, and more can be customized in the NASCAR options. These tweaks lend a feeling of authenticity to players who want to simulate working with a real racing group. Two players can compete in split-screen mode, with options for the cars, race, and opponents. Music and sound, which match the setting well, can be adjusted, and a decent selection of announcer phrases is included. This stock-car racer's evident commitment to delivering the NASCAR experience in its zenith era is unique and commendable.

Reflections: *NASCAR 2000*'s manual contains NASCAR trivia, including an estimate that 40% of NASCAR fans were women. At first, this might seem surprising, but in the 2000s, I knew several women who liked NASCAR, including my mother, sister, and some friends. My mom's favorite driver was Matt Kenseth because of his clean-cut image (almost a requirement for NASCAR racers, I thought) and because his car was sponsored by a company that my brother-in-law worked for (one of the smaller chassis logos). We even visited the headquarters of Roush Racing, which had a museum with Kenseth's cars and other memorabilia. Since then, DeWalt no longer sponsors NASCAR, although Kenseth is still racing 20 years after this release. – KN

NASCAR 99

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Stormfront Studios
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆

It is time to act out those NASCAR fantasies! This third-person racer has 37 cars emblazoned with official sponsor logos, 17 unique tracks, full audio commentary clips, and more. In a typical race, 20 cars compete for first place within a set number of laps, either in a single race or a championship campaign. A two-player mode is available and can include other cars if desired. Most tracks are ovular and in daylight, although a few have more complex layouts, and a few occur at night. During gameplay, players can instantly switch between multiple camera perspectives, including various distances from behind and inside the vehicle, with information about speed and performance overlaid on the screen. Besides overtaking adversaries, the player must avoid damage (if enabled) and visit the pit stop for repairs and maintenance. Fixes require driving into the pit road and selecting the desired repairs from the service menu. Crashes change the physical appearance of cars, with smoke and pieces bending or breaking off. The simplicity of turning left repeatedly belies the difficulty of consistently negotiating the palpable forces of the curves. Fortunately, menu options offer extensive customization for controls, gameplay, and car performance, which can make handling more comfortable or more challenging. The number of laps and race length are also adjustable, which is extremely welcome given that a real-life NASCAR race can last for three hours. Physics may be adjusted to arcade or simulation modes for less or more realism, and players can tune suspension, steering, and transmission, along with customizing opponents' strengths. The graphics are accurate and serviceable, although the fade-in effect on distant objects can be confusing. Fans will appreciate the roster of real-world drivers to play as, including famous names like Dale Earnhardt, Jeff Gordon, and Bobby Labonte. Overall, this title simulates the NASCAR experience effectively, even if it neglects to include much beyond plain and simple vehicle racing.



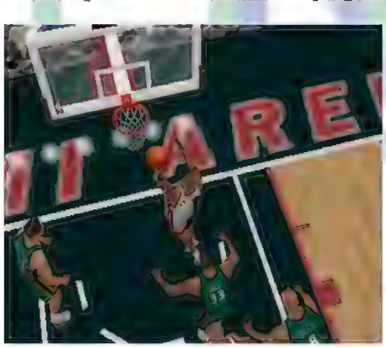
Reflections: A friend of mine had the PlayStation version of *NASCAR 99*, which is similar to the N64 release with a few key differences, including full-motion video and extra announcer clips. I would hang out at her place and watch her race. After a long while of staring at a swaying stock car bumper running along an endless grey road, I finally had to ask, "So... this is the whole game? That's all there is?" Even as I asked, I knew the answer: yes. That's NASCAR, after all. NASCAR isn't as popular now as it was in the '90s, when even a plain game like this could make it into teen girls' bedrooms. – KN

European Cartridge

NBA Courtside 2: Featuring Kobe Bryant

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Left Field Productions
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

A mid-air, reverse dunking Kobe Bryant is the cover athlete for one of the better basketball games on the system, featuring equally fun simulation and arcade play styles, an interesting Career Player mode, and extra features. The Arcade Play mode is more than just exhibition contests. Timed spots on the hardwood grant up to 15 points per shot, and there is also a team-wide Momentum Meter to empower players during scoring streaks. Make a couple of shots in a row, and the basketball gets a smoke plume, raising the team's shooting efficiency. Arcade Play mode also features above-the-rim dunks, a faster pace than simulation, and relaxed foul rules. The more realistic, full-season simulation games are slower-paced and emphasize play-calling. Teams will utilize grind-it-out low post offense from paint-filling beasts like Shaquille O'Neal and Patrick Ewing and constant defensive pressure, reminiscent of the basketball play of the '90s era. Advanced moves available to players on offense, like spins and crossover dribbles from wings like Bryant and Grant Hill, tend to be more effective in simulation mode. The AI provides a good, if uneven, challenge; it often doesn't know the best player on the floor, so don't be surprised when Karl Malone and John Stockton don't necessarily lead their team in scoring. Rosters are from the 1999-2000 NBA season, and sim mode allows for in-season trades, free agents, and stat tracking. Unfortunately, there is no AI for computer-managed teams. Nothing stops trades of bench players for all-stars or creating players with 99s in every category and immediately signing them to a roster. The Create-A-Player mode provides one interesting wrinkle – a "career" or rookie player. Created players start with low ratings in all categories and gain skills as they are utilized in games. Player progression is an interesting feature, but the lack of a continuing franchise mode with rosters and stats that carry over limits the potential of said progression since a created player's entire career can not be played out. Some extra play options add depth, like a 3-Point Contest, Practice, and a 2-on-2 mode for four players. Overall, the improvements to the arcade basketball, Create-A-Player, and other new modes help this one win the tip-ball from other hoops games on the system.



Reflections: The original *Courtside* sold more than one million units, so it's no surprise this follow-up was published. I can't remember playing the sequel back then, but the explanation is simple from looking at a calendar – it was released the same month as *NBA2K* for the Dreamcast, an immediate success that raised the bar substantially for all other basketball games. *NBA Courtside 2* ranks among the better basketball games on the N64, but it's akin to being the best dinosaur before the comet arrives. *NBA 3 on 3 Featuring Kobe Bryant* was also released for the Game Boy Color in Dec. 1999, to little fanfare and average reviews. *NBA Courtside 2002* for the GameCube was the third and final Courtside game released in Jan. 2002. It was released more than two years later than *NBA Courtside 2*, reflecting the catch-up work the series needed to do. It was the last game Left Field Productions developed before divesting itself of the minority stake Nintendo had purchased in it. It became a multi-platform developer in 2004 before shuttering in 2011. – SG

NBA Hangtime

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Games
Ported by: Director's Cut International
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Furious hardcourt action and spectacular slam dunks accentuate this excellent port of the exciting arcade basketball title. Two-on-two play occurs in a horizontal format featuring digitized sprite likenesses of NBA players from the 1996-1997 season. Entering a name and pin tracks progress on the way to Grand Champion after defeating all 29 teams. Each roster has five selectable players with individual attributes (Speed, Power, Shoot, Dunks, Steal, Block) – the two selected players may be swapped out at halftime. Gameplay in the time-accelerated three-minute quarters is quick and smooth on the offensive and defensive ends with simple yet nuanced mechanics. Three buttons (Shoot/Block, Pass/Steal, Turbo) allow for a variety of on-court moves. On offense, the standard jump shots, 3-pointers, layups, and slam dunks are possible, but players can also perform other moves: Patrick Ewing can throw up a hook shot, Reggie Miller a fadeaway jumper, and Karl Malone a leaning jumper. Alley-oops (passing to an in-air teammate about to dunk) and double dunks (alley oop from a dunking player to their teammate dunker) are incredibly fun features that put an exclamation point on the activities. The Turbo button increases player speed and passing speed, resulting in higher jumps and crazier dunks, such as spinning, windmill, somersault, and other ridiculous slams. The Turbo meter diminishes quickly, and care must be paid to its self-replenishment, so something like continually spinning while dribbling will empty it quickly. On defense, standard steals can swipe the ball away from an opponent, but combining the Steal and Turbo buttons results in more effective shoves. Timing defensive actions is key, like jumping to grab rebounds or swatting back shots with Hakeem Olajuwon. Using the time-based blocking system is immensely satisfying. The over-the-top tone is encapsulated when players are "on fire," resulting from three unanswered scores by the same player in a row. This means having unlimited Turbo, an increased shot percentage (with a smoking ball), blocking without goaltending, and even crazier dunks, with these effects ending when the opposing team scores. "Team Fire" occurs with three unanswered alley-oops/double dunks, with the result being both players being "on fire" for 20 seconds or until the opposing team performs an alley-oop or double dunk of their own.

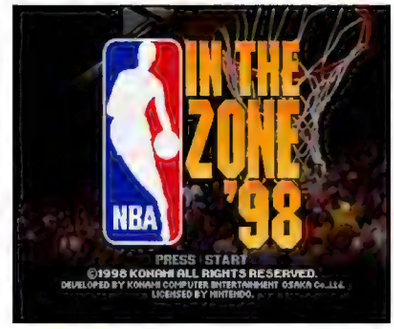
If hooping with NBA players doesn't quench that b-ball thirst, Create Player mode is available to tinker with. A custom baller can be formed from 42 real and ridiculous heads, uniforms, attributes (weight, height, player skills), privileges, and nicknames. If playing with a creation is still not enough, there are plenty of secret characters, Big Head mode, Baby mode, a rooftop court, and various gameplay-altering codes to liven proceedings. The overall presentation is simple but polished, and there are enough unique phrases from Neil Funk's very good play-by-play to impress and not grow stale. The colorful sprite graphics are faithful to the arcade version with distinguishable players, pretty courts, and a packed crowd, and sound effects such as ones from blocking and goaltending/shot-clock violations stand out. The in-game music is well-produced and bouncy, while the hip-hop theme track "Whatcha Gonna Do?" is particularly a catchy delight. If throwing down and experiencing this hoop fest with friends sounds appealing, up to four can have a fine time driving to the rim and exploding for monster jams. This wild court experience is a soaring arcade-caliber experience, and its high-altitude action above the rim should thrill both sports and non-sports fans alike.

Reflections: *NBA Hangtime* is the spiritual successor to Midway's excellent *NBA Jam* and *NBA Jam Tournament Editio*n and the peak of the series. The addition of new gameplay mechanics like alley-oops, timed blocks, and the create-a-player mode perfected a great arcade basketball formula they had created in 1993. The N64 would be the perfect home console to emulate the *Hangtime* arcade experience with its four built-in controller ports. Unfortunately, Midway lost the name rights to "NBA Jam" after *Tournament Edition*. Acclaim's *NBA Jam Extreme* directly competed with *Hangtime* in 1996 but failed to capture the magic that made the Midway titles so memorable. Midway would follow up *Hangtime* with *NBA Showtime: NBA on NBC*, but by then, the video game world had almost entirely moved on from sprite-based to polygonal game stylings, and along with it came a change in look and feel to Midway's juggernaut arcade series. – PC

European Cartridge

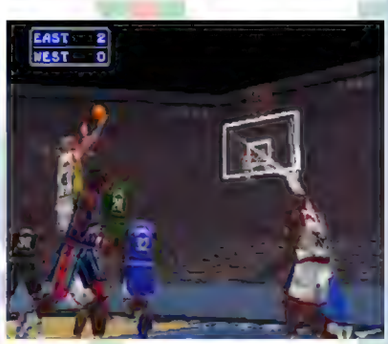
NBA In The Zone '98

NBA Pro '98 (EU)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆



This NBA-licensed basketball simulation is the first in Konami's series of titles that attempt to bring the excitement of five-on-five basketball to the N64. All 29 teams and complete rosters from the 1996-97 NBA season are available, excluding a certain Chicago Bulls Hall of Famer who appears as a "Roster Guard." Take on an opponent in a quick Exhibition match-up, compete in an All-Star game, or try to win the NBA Championship in Season or Playoff modes. Alter any team's roster through the Trade Player and Free Agency features or create a unique player whose stats can be adjusted to dominate, ride the pine, or anything in between. Up to four players can play in either versus or cooperative modes. Additional options allow players to select the quarter length (three, five, eight, or 12 minutes), pick the difficulty level, and toggle certain rules. The default broadcast view is decent, but players can experiment with ten different camera views until they find the one that best suits them. However, after the opening tip-off, the flaws become evident. The ambient crowd noise tracks well with the on-court play, but the audio is otherwise forgettable. The graphics are blurry, leaving players nearly indistinguishable from one another. Advanced offensive moves, such as driving, pivots, clutch dunks, and shot fakes, are available, but they're challenging to pull off due to being mapped to the C-buttons, which are not easy to switch to in the middle of an intense possession. Even on defense, players must use these buttons to perform otherwise simple tasks – including pass intercepts, which would be better handled by simply anticipating a pass and stepping in front of it. Players also move incredibly slowly, even while using the Turbo feature intended to add a speed boost. This sluggish pace prevents contests from ever becoming fast break experiences. The combination of severe control issues, slow gameplay, and dull graphics results in an airball debut for this series.

Reflections: I love a competent NBA simulation game, and as an avid player of similar NES and SNES titles, I was excited to play *NBA In The Zone '98*. Unfortunately, I've found that many simulation-style games have difficulty mastering that balance between realism and arcade fun, and this game is no exception. Maybe it's too much to expect that the AI will know that when they're on defense, down by a single point with ten seconds remaining, they should foul to stop the clock instead of letting me run the time out. Is it also too much to ask that a collection of highly paid professional basketball players routinely execute simple passes and not throw them out of bounds half the time? – JBr

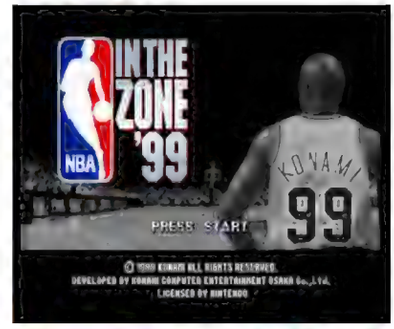


European Cartridge
NBA Pro '98

Japanese Cartridge

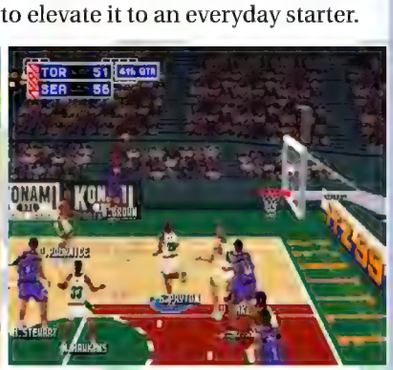
NBA In The Zone '99

NBA Pro '99 (EU)
NBA In The Zone 2 (JP)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆



The second N64 installment of the five-on-five basketball simulation series features realistic hardwood action from a dynamic courtside perspective. It includes all 29 licensed NBA teams with updated (pre-lockout) rosters for 1998-99. Challenge a friend or the computer for a quick match in Exhibition and All-Star modes, or sweat through Season and Playoff for a shot at an NBA Championship trophy. In Create Player mode, players can design their own professional basketball player with lights-out shooting skills, superior ball-handling, and incredible speed. Players can also be traded or exchanged via free agency. Players can customize offensive plays at the team level by selecting Formations to map to the D-pad, such as Isolation, Box, and Triangle. The primary controls for passing and shooting are easy to master; however, other actions have unnecessarily complicated control schemes. For example, free-throw shooting requires tilting the analog stick down while repeatedly pressing the A button to move a control gauge up and down, the goal being to release the stick when the gauge reaches the middle. New to the series is the 3-Point Shootout mode. Here, players run through a timed exercise, awkwardly pulling back and then releasing the analog stick at the top of a jump shot. A few useful features include Turbo, which boosts player speeds on offense, and the icon passing option, which identifies the teammate passes will go to before throwing the ball, resulting in fewer turnovers. The courts and arenas are bright and detailed, but player graphics have a blurred look, making it harder to identify individual players. Player animations during automatic replays are far more detailed, making it satisfying when one plays after pulling off alley-oop dunks, long-distance three-pointers, and other big plays. The arena announcer is dull, though the crowd noise makes up for it. There are some nice features, but the slow movements, bland player visuals, and overly complex controls are not enough to elevate it to an everyday starter.

Reflections: In addition to the not-so-fun 3-Point Shootout, *NBA In the Zone '99* added a play-calling "formation" system best described as pointless. Fast breaks, alley-oops, breakaway dunks, and kick-out three-pointers are staples of some of the best arcade-style basketball titles out there. None of those games focus their design so heavily on setting up the offense, calling a play, and then watching computer-controlled teammates slowly, methodically execute it. This series aims for simulation, so it delivers what it intends. The problem is that the delivered experience is neither all that enjoyable nor as exciting as the sport it seeks to simulate. – JBr



European Cartridge
NBA Pro '99

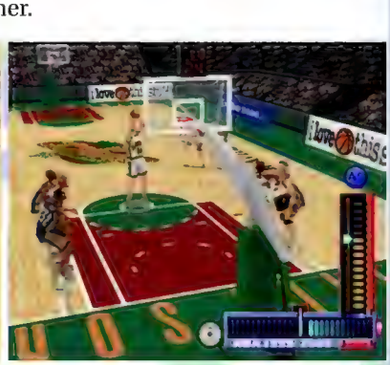
Japanese Cartridge
NBA In The Zone 2

NBA In the Zone 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

This five-on-five basketball simulation series returns for a third and final installment on the N64. There are updated, licensed player rosters reflecting the 1999-2000 NBA season, all 29 franchises, and six available gameplay modes, all of which play out from a dynamic courtside camera perspective that pivots with the action. Start with an Exhibition for a quick match-up against friends or the computer. All-Star mode shines as the quickest way to get top NBA players on the court, while Season offers a realistic simulation of an 82-game grind. Playoff mode skips right to the excitement of winner-takes-all tournament play. Two additional modes, 3Point Shootout, and Dunk Contest, offer a break from running up and down the court. While participating in a rim-rattling, jaw-dropping slam dunk contest sounds like every NBA fan's dream, completing thrilling dunks proves to be a nightmare, thanks to overcomplicated controls (rapidly press A, hold B, maneuver the Control Stick, then release B.) These frustrating control issues and uneven gameplay plague the other modes as well. Most players move sluggishly, shuffling into position or standing still entirely. The Z-button, used for drives, takes the player with possession from slow to supersonic, almost too fast to control reasonably. Shot types, such as hook shots and fade-aways, are based on court position and the direction of the Control Stick, so drives to the net can result in unwanted jumpers. There are many customization options, including multiple camera angles, configurable rules, stamina options, roster management through trades and free agency, player editing, etc. Unfortunately, these settings don't amount to much once players hit the court. Blocky and dull-looking player models with jerky, unnatural movements constantly take away from any hint of immersion. Some of the ambient court noises are also jarring, such as the constant sound of squeaking tennis shoes (even while no one is moving) or the dribbling sounding like artillery cannons. Mercifully, players can disable these sounds in the menu. Despite ample features, real-world players and teams with stats, and the possibility to play with up to four human players, the uninspired visuals and lifeless gameplay do not add up to a winner.

Reflections: When a sports series reaches its third entry, you expect to find a franchise that has corrected its earlier mistakes, fine-tuned its gameplay mechanics, improved the graphics, and presented a polished finished product. The NBA In the Zone series completely fails to do that. While the 2000 release may be the best entry in this series, that is faint praise, as it can't hold a candle to better NBA simulations. It's a shame, too, since the series had plenty of time to course-correct. – JBr



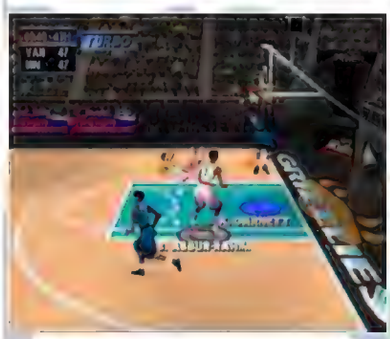
European Cartridge

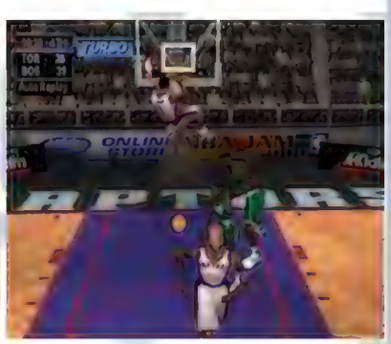
NBA Jam 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Welcome back to the jam! This hoops installment offers authentic simulation and arcade action. Play is presented through a broadcast-style aerial camera, but several alternate angles are available. Two distinct modes are offered, Sim and Jam. Sim mode focuses on realistic basketball, with traditional five-on-five competition, though players can adjust the ruleset, quarter length, and even game speed to their liking. In Jam mode, contests are two-on-two with huge dunks and vicious blocks aplenty. Jam's pace is quick, there are no fouls, and the whistle only blows for goaltending. The controls are heavily catered toward Sim mode but are mostly responsive. Shooting, blocking, and passing (mapped to the A and B buttons) feel natural and precise, but some more advanced actions come off as clunky. Post moves, for example, are drawn out by slow animations, and their C-up input can pull the thumb just far enough away from A to affect how quickly players can follow up with a shot. There is also an awful Control-stick-heavy approach to free-throw shooting that makes trips to the line miserable, even when there is a training mode to practice in freely. In Sim, players can run an exhibition, jump right into the playoffs, or take the reigns as GM of their selected team in the multi-year season mode. All three Sim modes can be played with either the official 1999-2000 NBA rosters or ones created through a fantasy draft. Jam mode offers quick play and Jam Tournament, where one to two players can challenge the rest of the league, but as a whole, the mode doesn't have many legs, and an entirely separate Controller Pak is needed to save any progress within it. The overall presentation is a mixed bag. Player models are serviceable but aren't highly detailed, arenas are flat and lifeless, and Marv Albert has pretty forgettable pregame and halftime interludes. However, Kevin Harlan gives engaged commentary that helps elevate the on-court action. The arcade suite won't hold attention for long, but there is decent mileage to get out of Sim mode for devout basketball fans, provided players can tolerate some notable issues.

Reflections: Like with *NBA Jam 99*, *Jam 2000* feels like it should be called something else. The Jam name is synonymous with two-on-two arcade basketball, and including Jam mode felt like a recognition of that. However, it ends up being a half-baked part compared to a much more robust and thought-out simulation, even if it is not all that different from the previous year. Sim mode also led to the moment that defined my time with *NBA Jam 2000*, for better or worse. It was the offseason, and Allen Iverson needed a new deal. Season mode uses a point-based salary cap system, and I offered Allen two-thirds of my available points to keep him on the 76ers. My offer was rejected, not from him joining another team... but to play in Europe. I'm still processing that. – NT





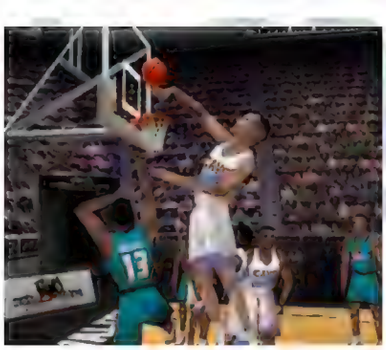
European Cartridge

NBA Jam 99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana West
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

This 5-on-5 basketball 3D sim heavily focuses on authenticity. Several modes are put at the forefront. There is a standard one-game Exhibition, a Playoff mode to compete for the NBA title from the get-go, and a multi-year Season mode that lets players build their selected franchise into the league's next powerhouse. The option of playing with the official 1998-1999 NBA rosters or completely reshaping ones via a fantasy draft is available in each of the three modes. On the court, the controls are fairly easy to grasp. A will shoot and block, B passes and steals, and the R and C buttons are for more advanced inputs like playcalling, crossovers, and icon passing. It all feels intuitive for the most part, but the layout isn't perfect. For instance, cycling players on defense with the Left C and R buttons never feels natural, and a Control Stick-heavy approach to free throw shooting is far more frustrating than needed. Games are shown from a broadcast-style camera angle by default, although there are eight other perspectives to switch to. Players move with fluid animations, and the moment-to-moment action hits a nice balance of being slow enough to process plays while being fast enough to stay exciting. Gameplay is also helped by AI, which always seems to react realistically to where the ball is. The player models themselves, unfortunately, don't look all that impressive, and the crowds and arenas appear pretty flat. Kevin Harlan and Bill Walton regularly chime in with charismatic commentary, but they can only do so much in helping games feel livelier. Season mode gives players incredible control in a constantly active league simulation. Trades require negotiation with a CPU that will always look for a fair deal, and the rest of the league will also make moves to try and improve. Teams can be altered via draft selections, signing and releasing players in the offseason, creating new players, and making a custom playbook from a list of more than 80 offensive setups. There is even an option to turn on a point-based salary cap that can be managed for an extra challenge. Jam Mode is a quick game format that calls back to the franchise's arcade roots, switching off the rules, adding wilder dunks, and having players catch fire with consecutive shots. A three-point shootout offers a short and sweet mini-game to play alone or with friends. Basketball die-hards could find an enjoyable sim here, but players may have to look past a couple of control issues to get the most out of it.

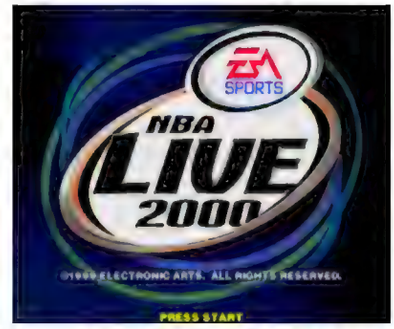
Reflections: *NBA Jam 99* is a good experience with the wrong name. By the time this was released, the NBA Jam name was synonymous with fast-paced, two-on-two arcade basketball. But this game isn't that. Midway made the Jam games that got popular, but after Acclaim secured the naming rights, Midway kept the arcade format with *NBA Hangtime*, while Acclaim went for realism. Again, I still think this is a solid basketball sim. Getting the Sonics to the finals in Season mode was a fun ride. Well, up until I lost the series to Boston on a buzzer-beating three. Trust me, I'm not mad anymore. – NT

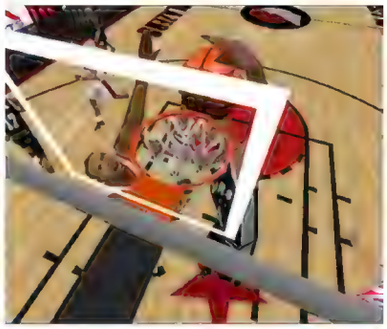


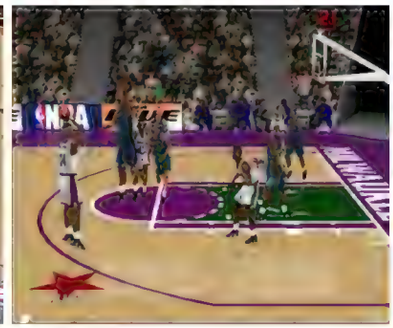
European Cartridge

NBA Live 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: NuFX
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

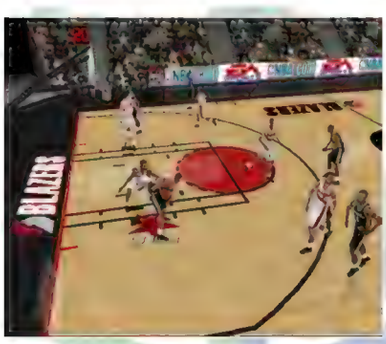


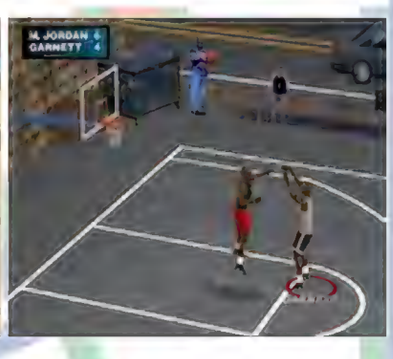




The fully licensed NBA Live franchise returns for its second and final year on the N64, and for the first time, it includes Michael Jordan. Select a team and run through the relaxed-rules Arcade, Exhibition, Season, or Playoff modes, take a favorite player and compete in a Three-Point Shootout, or play against Jordan himself in a new 1-on-1 Challenge. The analog stick controls movement, the A button handles passing and switching players, and the B button for shooting and jumping to block or rebound. Players can get by with that basic setup, but the C buttons – used to sprint, spin, crossover, and set up picks on offense, steal, hand-check, and call for double teams on defense – greatly expand controls and are necessary for competing on higher difficulties. The on-court product, presented through a horizontally angled, broadcast-style overhead camera, is a solid and mostly enjoyable basketball experience, but inconsistent frame rates and sometimes broken animations are detrimental to the sports action. The graphics and presentation have issues, too. Player models can look spot-on to their real-life counterparts from one angle, then abstract, polygonal messes from another. That they can emote and converse makes the variation even wilder. TV-style instant replays can bring the action to a halt by playing a clip that runs at an awfully low frame rate. It disrupts the flow and sometimes feels like a punishment rather than a reward for making a great play or a flashy dunk. However, the in-game sound effects are excellent. Every dribble, shoe squeak, swish, and bounce off the glass sounds fantastic. The crowd also erupts after big plays from the home team, which goes a long way in making the arena feel lively. This decent basketball experience can do well on the floor, but a few notable flaws prevent it from sinking the big shot.

Reflections: In an otherwise serviceable licensed basketball game, the inclusion and implementation of Michael Jordan was a real standout for me. "His Airness" was well into his second retirement by the time *NBA Live 2000* was released, and he wasn't treated like any other player. Instead, he was a boss for 1-on-1 mode and a fierce one at that. Jordan is the best player in the game by a wide margin, and I spent a lot of time trying to beat him. The reward is his availability in the free-agent pool, and let me tell you, he would've looked good in a Sixers uniform. – NT





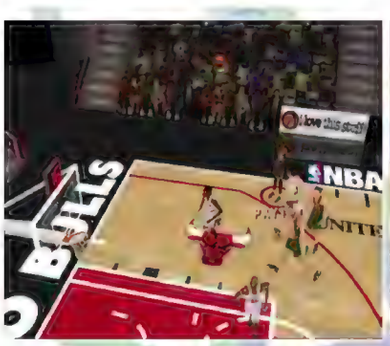
European Cartridge

NBA Live 99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: NuFX
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

The fully licensed NBA Live franchise kicks off on the N64, delivering the entire 1998-1999 season for players to run through. Play occurs in a broadcast-style, angled horizontal perspective, where the camera shifts left and right depending on where the ball is. There are Exhibition, Season, and Playoff modes for game-after-game action, an Arcade Mode, and an All-Star Weekend-style Three-Point Shootout. The shootout isn't all that in-depth, but it can be a fun change of pace with up to three friends to see who can drain the most shots. Arcade, on the other hand, isn't all that different from a standard Exhibition game except that it adds cartoon sound effects and exaggerated dunks that end up being obnoxious rather than charming. Games can be played with just the analog stick and the A and B buttons to pass/switch players and shoot/block, respectively. Using the C-buttons will allow ball handlers to sprint, spin, or crossover and, on defense, steal, hand-check, or call for a double team. The core gameplay is competent, but choppy player animations and inconsistent frame rates make the experience feel less than optimized. Player models are passable up close but can look deformed whenever they get too far from the camera or when transitioning into specific animations. The arenas utilize a single model, so aside from corresponding court designs, there is nothing that sets a favorite team's home venue apart from the others. Also of unfortunate design are the crowds that consist of a single texture that leaves stands looking like a muddy pile of pixels. Combined with limited crowd noise and bare-bones commentary from broadcaster Don Poier, the on-court product feels fairly lifeless. Unfortunately, this hardwood franchise's debut on the system is a shallow and underwhelming experience.

Reflections: *NBA Live 99*'s opening cinematic shows the player model of cover star Antoine Walker fading in and out of motion-captured shooting and dunking animations for about 40 seconds. It lacks any natural energy or excitement, perfectly setting the tone for the rest of the game. After playing my first game, I felt like I had seen everything *NBA Live 99* had to offer. Delving deeper into the other modes didn't prove me wrong. The NBA players and teams are all there, and the gameplay is serviceable, but there isn't much else to keep you going. This was the bare minimum of effort for an NBA-licensed title, and it's clear from the second the game starts. – NT

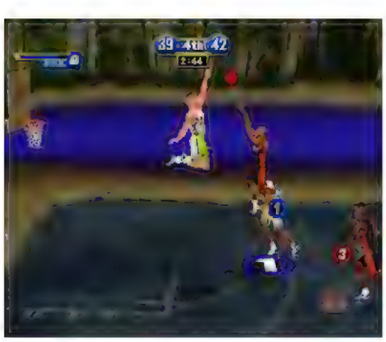


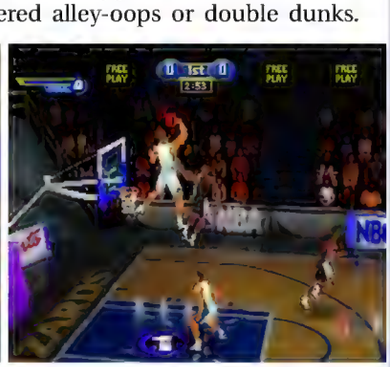
European Cartridge

NBA Showtime: NBA on NBC

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Midway Games
Ported by: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

This sequel to *NBA Hangtime* features two-on-two arcade basketball action from a side-view camera that occasionally angles in for a dash of 3D perspective. Up to four can join any game, or a solo player can try to earn the ranking of Grand Champion by defeating all other teams. All 29 NBA-licensed teams from the 1999-2000 season are here, each with four to six players on their roster. Players have several individually rated offensive and defensive attributes for categories like dribbling, dunking, blocking, shooting, speed, etc. These stats are crucial for deciding who starts each game. Controls for offense/defense consist of a Pass/Steal button, Shoot/Block, and a Turbo button with a self-replenishing meter to speed up players and enable special abilities, like jumping higher for shots, blocks, and rebounds. The fast and furious gameplay features over-the-top monster-leaping dunks, sizzle-reel-worthy alley-oops, and double dunks (going for a dunk and then passing to a teammate while in mid-air). Some moves are easy to pull off, like quickly tapping Turbo twice to spin past would-be defenders. However, the alley-oop requires a little practice to perfect the timing, where the player must be using Turbo when driving to the hoop and jump up for the pass just past the free throw line. It feels exhilarating when executed successfully, especially when accomplished with an all-star combo like Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal. If a player scores three unanswered baskets, they become "on fire," which makes shot attempts almost always connect and an unlimited Turbo meter until the opposition scores. "Team Fire" occurs with three unanswered alley-oops or double dunks.



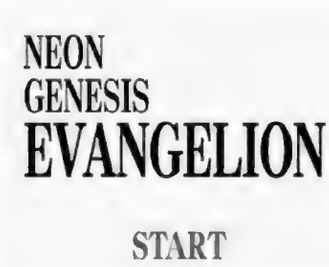


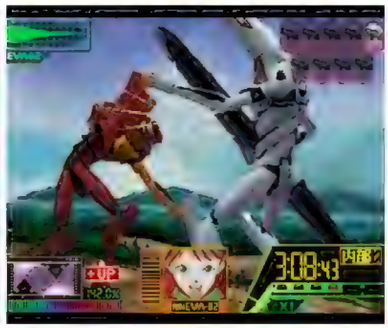
Defensive play consists of covering ball handlers, attempting steals, and timed blocks, but players can also shove opponents to the floor with Steal + Turbo. Players must be mindful of all that pushing, as refs will call fouls for excessive shoves. After five fouls, the player on the receiving end of the most recent one is rewarded with an uncontested free throw worth three points. At halftime, fresh players can be substituted in. Competitors are rewarded with a brief respite post-game with a singular trivia question testing knowledge in categories like NBA records and yearly roster rotations. User stats for win-loss records and accumulative in-game stats are saved to the Controller Pak, which can also store a custom player to the profile. Created players start with low attribute ratings and a limited selection of heads, but playing and winning with these players will unlock more. The NBC Sports license is ubiquitous throughout, with its logos present during gaming. The catchy "Roundball Rock" theme blares while browsing menus, and the iconic Tim Kitzrow returns for his trademark play-by-play calls. Arcade basketball has never felt better in 3D, and this will be a hit worth revisiting for guaranteed good times in single- and multiplayer!

Reflections: Key members of the original *NBA Jam* development team returned for *NBA Showtime*, lending their experience to help pivot the title into 3D. This title easily outperforms *NBA Jam Extreme*, Acclaim's 1996 attempt to do the same. In addition to a better look and feel, *Showtime* is also loaded with button sequences you can enter at the Tonight's Match-Up screen to alter the experience, including a vintage Big Head mode and hidden courts of the tropical and street variety. The NBA stopped airing on NBC in 2002, so multiple generations have missed out on the legendary "Roundball Rock" theme but can rediscover its greatness by searching online for the classic *Saturday Night Live* sketch detailing its origins. – DK

Neon Genesis Evangelion

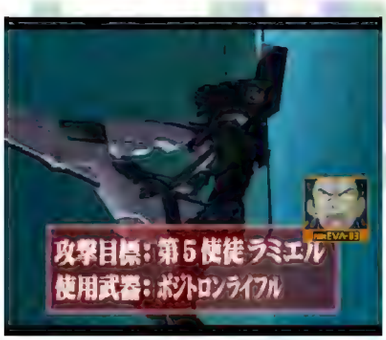
Genre: Fighting, Action
Release Date: June 1999
Region: JP
Developer: BEC
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆





Otherworldly beings called angels are attacking Japan. Several teens must fight them one by one by piloting giant robots called Evangelion, unearthing secrets along the way. This adaptation mirrors its anime source material with matching images, sounds, and visual shots, creating a cinematic experience played through 13 missions from the series in the primary Story Mode. The gameplay accommodates the story, not vice versa, so missions vary wildly depending on what's happening. Each mission has its own camera angles, controls, and scenarios. For example, in one, the player will line up crosshairs to shoot an enemy using the analog stick. In others, tasks range from hammering A and C-down buttons to chase a runaway robot, aiming the spear of Longinus with the analog stick as it flies through the atmosphere, and pressing buttons to a dance rhythm to synchronize an attack. There are often on-screen icons indicating what to press or bars showing mission progress or health, as well as the Start button, which provides instructions with the controls for the mission. This story-driven approach adds variety, making the title play like a series of mini-games. A notable exception is missions where an Evangelion brawls with enemies, giving direct control from a side-view perspective to move towards and away from foes, block, strike, generate a protective A.T. Field, and perform combination attacks to chip away at enemy health. Appropriate for their size, the massive Evangelion and enemies move sluggishly. The pilot's face appears in a thumbnail box, reacting to events; in most missions, the player takes the role of Shinji, but Rei and Asuka fight their own battles. Impressive cutscenes play before, after, and during assignments, necessitating alerts indicating when the player is in control. Only "Easy" difficulty is initially available, but playing through Story opens more challenging choices. It also unlocks new pilots (including Touji) for Simulation Mode, a first-person shooting gallery. The gameplay can be stiff and linear, but the overall presentation and sheer variety of experiences compensate for a lot. *Evangelion* fans will enjoy this release, though non-fans will struggle to search for a cohesive experience.

Reflections: While I'm no "otaku," I do enjoy quality anime. Fitting the casual anime fan cliché, *Evangelion* is one of my favorites. When I first watched it about 20 years ago I had never seen anything like it. Eventually, I even bought the score on CD. I've known about the N64 adaptation for years, and I'm glad to have finally played it, even if it's not great. The eclectic gameplay and fast pace somehow feel modern, however. It's a video game that seems to assume you've been playing them for years and expects you to adapt quickly. – KN

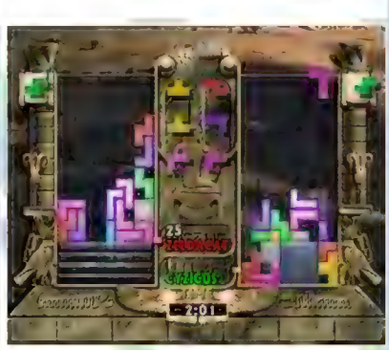


The New Tetris

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: H20 Entertainment
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Build the wonders of the world, brick by brick! From a flat 2D perspective, players rotate and position each tetromino (four-squared shape) as it falls into the playfield, aiming to form them into horizontal lines. Completed lines disappear, awarding a Line point. A preview window shows the next three upcoming pieces. The Hold Piece feature allows players to store their current piece using the L button and then swap it back in when needed. Spin Moves can also be used to rotate tetrominoes into tight spaces. If it completes a line, the surrounding bricks loosen from the tetromino shape and fall, potentially cascading into more matches. Bonus Lines are then awarded for each line cleared. Four-by-four block arrangements fuse to become silver Multi-Squares or golden Mono-Squares if they are built entirely out of one tetromino type. Multi-Squares and Mono-Squares award five or ten Lines, respectively, for each line that includes them. These rules incentivize focusing on strategic arrangements rather than mindlessly creating matches. There are three modes for solo play, with computer-controlled opponents, or with a group of up to four people: Sprint sets a three-minute timer, Ultra ends at 150 Lines, and Marathon continues until players are defeated. Playing multiplayer also adds optional Garbage modes that let players send annoying garbage lines to opponents whenever they complete more than one line. Hot Potato Garbage sends these lines to a randomly selected player, while Directed sends them to an opponent of each player's choice. Wonders, which unlock new environments and music based on civilizations like Greece or Russia, are automatically built as players amass Lines. Player statistics are saved to the Game Pak, as is Wonder progress. Progress can even be transferred via Controller Pak, allowing friends to contribute to Wonder construction. This edition of the classic puzzle game faithfully captures the Tetris formula while adding clever mechanical twists that will challenge puzzle players of all types, especially fans of the series.

Reflections: In this fourth and final Tetris game for the N64, lead programmer David Pridie experimented with the classic formula with Multi-Squares and Mono-Squares. The results were definitely a net positive, and felt right at home in a Tetris title. Pridie also famously hid an extended rant about his co-workers in the code, known as the TetrisRant. This tale comes with a sad conclusion, though: Pridie passed away just two years after *The New Tetris* released. David's long-time passion for game development is much more than his anecdotal rant – it is reflected in the works he brought to life, including this game. – DG



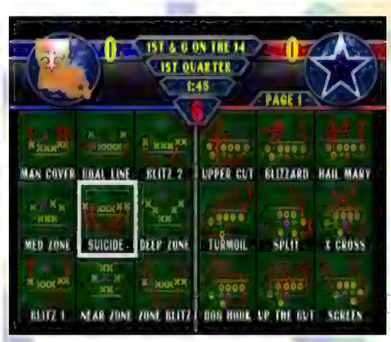
European Cartridge

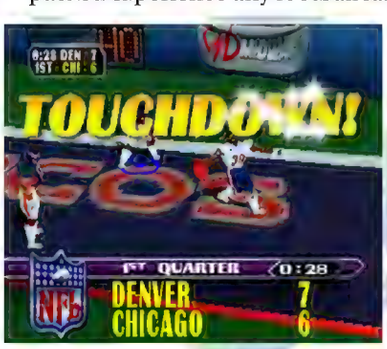
NFL Blitz

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 1998
Region: NA
Developer: Midway Games
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

This port of the NFL-licensed arcade game offers a brutal take on football that plays fast and loose with the standard rules. Teams of seven players (instead of the regulation 11) face off in lightning-quick ten-minute games viewed from an angled vertical perspective. With each play, players must do everything possible to score a touchdown or stop the opponent from doing the same. Defensive strategy includes savaging receivers before they make contact with the ball, crushing opponents after plays have ended, and unleashing exaggerated takedowns straight out of a pro wrestling match. Modes include a single game against an AI or human opponent, a full season complete with stat tracking, and a play editor that enables customization of offensive play calls. The simple controls utilize two buttons to pass, tackle, hurdle, and stiff-arm, along with a turbo button that will increase the speed and savagery of players in short bursts. While the controls are generally responsive, passing lacks precision in cases where multiple receivers closely bunch. A blatant "rubber band" difficulty system ensures that losing AI or human opponents have dramatically increased chances to intercept passes or recover fumbles. While this does guarantee that every game is competitive, it creates perverse incentives to win. Shifting strategic focus away from running smart plays and towards manipulating the clock to get the final possession of a one-score contest is an effective way to work the system. Even with over-the-top violent tactics, players may find it almost impossible to restrain the offense thanks to a potent mix of quick passing, spins, flying hurdles, and concussive stiff arms. It is also a certainty they will rub it in with disrespectful celebrations when foes reach the end zone. Despite the imprecise controls and exaggerated comeback mechanics, this excellent execution of outrageous concepts creates an action-packed experience any football fan can appreciate.

Reflections: The NFL was unsure about *NFL Blitz*'s ultra-violent representation of football. The original prototype actually featured more extreme hits that were removed at the NFL's insistence. The franchise was successful enough to receive two arcade updates, other ports, and releases on home and handheld consoles. Later updates grew gradually more muted, though, so if you want the purest, most violent entry in the franchise, this is your best option, unless you want to brave the non-licensed and decidedly more adult spinoff, *Blitz: The League*. – JM





NFL Blitz 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Midway Games
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

Gridiron brutality returns in this port of the NFL-licensed arcade game's first update. While the on-field action initially resembles football on the angled vertical field, seven-man teams instead of 11, 30 yards for a first down instead of ten, and lack of any penalties make it clear this is a whole new ballgame. Single-game, full season, and team tournament modes for up to eight players provide plenty of action, with frenetic four-player games available in all but the solo-exclusive season mode. Two buttons pass, dive, tackle, hurdle, and stiff-arm, along with a turbo button that temporarily boosts speed and power. A robust play editor allows players to build their own playbook and specify audibles to adjust plays before the snap. The real standout gameplay feature is the professional wrestling style of defense: offenses will routinely be assaulted with leg drops, German suplexes, and bulldogs; defenders will happily add insult to injury with post-hit taunting, too. Games are quick, high-scoring affairs, but the rubber band difficulty system keeps games close by rigging outcomes in favor of the losing team. Fortunately, this system is counterbalanced by an "on fire" mechanic, which rewards repeated success by giving players superhuman abilities. Having blocks demolished or watching would-be tacklers dragged in the ball carrier's wake is normally a humiliating experience. However, when a player's on fire, it's great fun to see this happen to the opposing team members. The visuals shine with smooth animations, minimal slowdown, and an eye-catching style that portrays the players as freakishly inflated musclemen. This meticulously crafted title is fast, furious, incredibly memorable, and has a much broader appeal than just to football fans

Reflections: While the animations of *NFL Blitz 2000* are just nasty enough, the audio experience adds a level of cruelty to the proceedings that perfectly punctuates the savagery: "I think it's broken!" "If I were you, I'd just stay down!" "That was uncalled for but a lot of fun to watch!" My personal favorite is "I'll send you back to your mother in a box!" This is a title with a single-minded dedication to an extreme concept, and these little pieces of dialogue serve to magnify the quality of the game in a manner that you could almost call charming were it not for the slightly disturbing subject matter. – JM

NFL Blitz 2001

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Sept. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Midway Games
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

"No Refs. No Rules. No Mercy." This official slogan is an apt summary of the brutal football on display. The vertical isometric action in this NFL-licensed port of the arcade title could loosely be called football. However, seven players per side rather than the traditional 11, a noticeable lack of penalties, needing 30 yards for a first down instead of the regulation 10, and a prevalence of professional wrestling maneuvers masquerading as tackles make it clear that this is far from a faithful simulator. Modes include four-player Exhibitions and Tournaments and a Season mode that allows players to run through a full season solo or cooperatively with a friend. Several mini-games are available that essentially are a tutorial on basic offensive and defensive strategy but are enjoyable enough to play around with on their own. The action is controlled with two buttons to pass, dive, tackle, and stiff-arm, along with a third Turbo button that will temporarily boost the speed and savagery of players. An impressive play editor facilitates crafting customized game plans and audibles to cook up the right balance of downfield passes, quick hitters, and creative defensive looks to crush foes in body and mind. Contests are rapid-fire, high-scoring showdowns that typically finish in 15 minutes, but the irritating rubber band difficulty system will make attaining a substantial lead nearly impossible by ratcheting up the frequency of fumbles and interceptions from the winning team, among other handicaps. Fortunately, this is offset somewhat by the "on fire" mechanic, triggered by repeatedly achieving big plays on offense or defense, dramatically improving players' abilities. On-field players are on the verge of ignition when they start smoking, which injects high-intensity moments where it becomes strategically important to light friendly players on fire or prevent the same for the opponent. The visuals present smooth animations and an appealing style that exaggerates the players' physiques to levels of bulk normally reserved for cartoons. This merciless take on football is extremely well-designed and provides a fast and fun experience for dedicated and casual fans alike.

Reflections: The *NFL Blitz 2001* experience is extraordinarily similar to the excellent *NFL Blitz 2000*, with some small additions, including a few new mini-games and some alterations to the AI's defensive patterns. Neither of these changes the quality of the experience in the slightest; it's just nice to know they exist. If you're looking for pure, entertaining arcade football action, you can't go wrong with this release or its predecessor. Back in the day, however, most owners of *2000* were probably underwhelmed when buying this humble update. – JM

NFL Blitz Special Edition

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 2001
Region: NA
Developer: Midway Games
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆☆☆

This title is a minor revision to *NFL Blitz 2001*, tacking on only a roster, schedule, and uniform update to the prior year's title. The hard-hitting and lawless football action from the previous game returns unchanged, so those interested in a more thorough review of the experience can refer to the *NFL Blitz 2001* review. If playing with the new release's updated NFL roster is an important factor, this title provides a great time in single and multiplayer, but nothing above and beyond the features already present in the previous year's installment.

Reflections: Anyone seeking to obtain a complete set of Nintendo 64 games knows that *NFL Blitz Special Edition* is one of the more difficult ones to obtain. It was released solely as a Blockbuster rental, although Blockbuster did later sell copies to interested consumers. This release was part of a broader partnership between Nintendo and Blockbuster that featured several exclusives for the late '90s rental giant, including *Razor Freestyle Scooter*, *Stunt Racer*, and *Clay Fighter: Sculptor's Cut*, one of the rarest games on the system. Most of these titles began as exclusives but were eventually released more broadly due to poor rental performances. This was not the case with *Special Edition*, which remained exclusive to Blockbuster and is difficult and pricey to obtain, particularly complete in the box. – JM

NFL Quarterback Club '98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆

The N64's first football game looks and sounds like the real thing and offers a full season mode, player transactions, and a variety of unique play scenarios. Unfortunately, the actual gameplay leaves much to be desired. Visuals are from the perspective of the QB or ball carrier on offense, with free control while on defense, with the camera centered on the line of scrimmage by default. Player movement and game speed are so sluggish that it's hard to execute any running plays unless the ball carrier is ignored by the defense – which does happen sometimes – and passing is somehow worse. Balls regularly ricochet off receivers' hands and comically bounce 10 feet in the air multiple times per game. Some passes will slip through triple coverage, while others get picked off by a defender who doesn't seem close enough. Once players experiment with the playbook, though, there are enough gaps in the AI to exploit to make most games trivial. The lack of gameplay polish overshadows all the good options, chief among them expansive, history-based scenarios. An example is replaying past Super Bowls as the losing teams and attempting to rewrite history. There is even an option to set up games in specific scenarios, like trailing by 21 points at halftime or nursing a 2-point lead with 60 seconds left. While the season mode has correct NFL player names and things like long-term injuries, the player names are unfortunately missing for the scenarios. The roster management is also very rudimentary – a salary cap and roster size are the only limiting factors for trades, as scrub QBs can be traded straight up for stars. Players can create up to 22 players for the free agent pool and even execute a four-player Fantasy Draft and Create-A-Team via trades and the free agent pool. Player attributes are also not balanced well: For more than one team, the starting punter or kicker will have better throwing attributes than the starting quarterback. Commentary is provided by Marv Albert (mostly known for NBA basketball), but it adds a layer of sheen. Graphics are crisp, with their high-definition nature being a chief advertising component. However, the motion capture athletes used were former NFL running back Adrian Murrell and defensive back Lonnie Young, and as a result, all players look square-jawed and thick, even kickers and punters. Thanks to the bugs, there are a few laughs to be had, but otherwise, there is little reason to play short of nostalgia for 1997-1998 NFL rosters.

Reflections: *NFL Quarterback Club '98* beat *Madden 64* to the market by a single week, the first of four head-to-head match-ups between the two franchises on the platform. While the series is now a historical footnote, from 1994 through 2001, it challenged the Madden game franchise when it came to realistic, simulation football. The emergence of the NFL 2K series in 1999 further cut into its sales, and the last release was for the GameCube in 2001. The series title refers to an old QB skills competition, which was present in the first release of the series but periodically disappeared and returned after that point... this installment doesn't have it. – SG

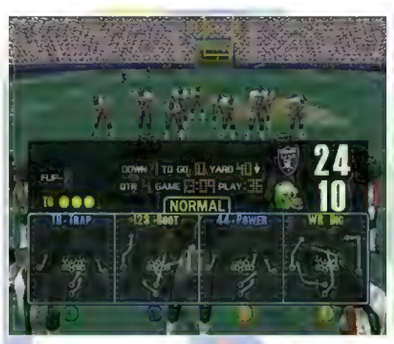
European Cartridge

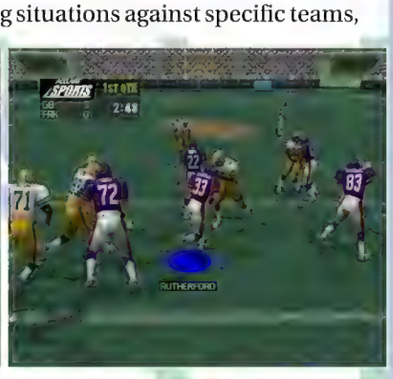
NFL Quarterback Club '99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Get ready for an NFL-licensed simulation of American football, emphasizing speed and a quicker pace, with most of the action taking place from behind the ball. Single exhibition games, NFL Season Play, Playoffs, Tournament Play, and Simulations are available. On the field, players seem like they are on ice at times, as the quick offensive ball runs to the outside (assisted by a Turbo button), spins, stiff arms, and jukes are nearly impossible for the defense to stop. Running is easy, but the passing game is challenging to master – cornerbacks and linebackers are OK in coverage, and the offensive line is poor at sustained blocking. Passing is via a controller icon, with each receiver assigned a button, and quarterbacks can throw "bullet" passes by holding down the respective button and lobs by tapping it. Unfortunately, computer defenders react so quickly that it feels closer to luck when completing a pass. However, a mostly unstoppable play is simply scrambling if playing as a fast QB, as the CPU won't adjust. On defense, any player can be controlled for tackle attempts, trying to get past blockers with swim moves and forearm shivers, or attempting pass-blocking jumpers or interceptions in coverage. The offensive CPU doesn't exploit game bugs and fails to shift blocking based on irregular positioning, which can result in a free rush straight to the QB. The biggest issue on defense is playcalling. There is not ample time to select a defensive formation, and there are not many options. Switching from "normal" personnel to a nickel or dime defensive package requires tapping the R button and is not intuitive. Season mode has one noteworthy facet: player progression. Player ratings change based on game performances and persist from season to season, meaning eventually, even poor teams could win a Super Bowl. However, NFL Season Play is stunted by an inability to trade, cut, or draft players, especially since players can get injured, and team transactions cannot be conducted after a season starts. The lack of a continuing franchise mode also hurts. In the interesting Simulations, Super Bowl losers can be played during their lowest game point to change history. Custom simulations can be created, which allows practicing situations against specific teams, defensive formations, and game times – a neat training tool. There are also options to create players, create a team, do a league fantasy draft, or use NFL Europe teams in the season mode. The visuals and sounds – play-by-play by ESPN's Mike Patrick and commentary by former pro Randy Cross – are positive but not revolutionary. This fast-playing, visually slick football outing is briefly fun but lacks the depth to hook completely.

Reflections: *NFL Quarterback Club '99* is a noticeable improvement from the previous year's *NFL Quarterback Club '98*. The running game is viable, and they clearly use more than one retired running back for the motion capture, as punters no longer look like linemen, but there are still too many rough edges and many ways to cheese the AI. Worse, *Madden NFL 99* featured a genre-revolutionizing franchise mode that included an NFL draft and the option to extend 15 years into the future. In comparison, *NFL Quarterback Club '99* is sorely lacking. – SG

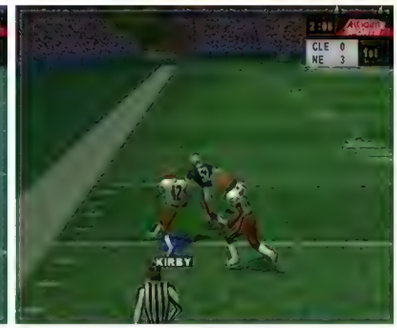




European Cartridge

NFL Quarterback Club 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios Austin
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneously)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆



The football "club" returns with a visually appealing, licensed NFL outing, but that's where almost all of the positive qualities end for the 2000 edition. Modes include single-game Exhibition, Season, Playoffs, Historical Simulations, and Custom Games, but no Franchise mode. While the graphics are crisp and impressive, and the play-by-play from Mike Patrick and Randy Cross is fine, the actual football gameplay is horrible. Although titled "Quarterback Club," passing is a nightmare. Tapping L or Z brings up target buttons on the overhead vertical field to pass to, like B or C-down. However, hitting the corresponding button switches control to that receiver, which results in running the receiver's route toward the ball and pressing C-left simultaneously to make the catch – a cumbersome mechanic. There is also an optional and overly complex pinpoint passing mode, which adds meters for passing accuracy and strength. The running game is fine, although there is no "speed burst" button inexplicably – instead, it is a slow down or brake. In normal football, a player like Barry Sanders can stop to let a defender zoom past him, but here, it just means they get clobbered by the AI. The other ball carrier moves – spin, stiff arm, juke, hurdle, dive, and the up-and-over for goal line situations – work much better. Given how difficult passing is, running is always a better choice, and the computer won't adjust play calling and formations even if the same play is chosen 20 times in a row. On defense, success feels random because of the limited move set. Players can only tackle, perform a rush move, or jump up to swat down or intercept a pass – no swim or spin moves. Frankly, though, on offense or defense, the AI has major problems blocking, and quarterbacks get hit multiple times per game before they can even hand off to running backs, which seldom happens in the NFL. Also, the animation is slow, making the controls feel heavy/clunky. The visual detail can be changed from its default setting of high to medium or low to improve animation performance, but that eliminates one of the few positives. Another "feature" is instant replays that cannot be turned off or skipped. Some rich customization options include creating playbooks, teams, and players, setting practice scenarios, and completing a fantasy draft with all of the team rosters and classic players. However, woeful gameplay undermines these options. There may be fun here due to the broken and janky gameplay, but any serious attempt to play proper football will cause frustration.

Reflections: After several years of being behind but competitive with the Madden series, *NFL Quarterback Club 2000* is a shockingly bad effort and substantially worse than the '99 edition. The character models look nice, but every other aspect is deficient. What little entertainment there is from this effort comes from unintentional comedy, like the opening animation, which features a model of Hall of Fame QB Brett Favre dancing like a madman as he watches highlight clips of other players. You can also turn the resolution low and pit the resulting grotesque polygon creatures against one another for fun. – SG

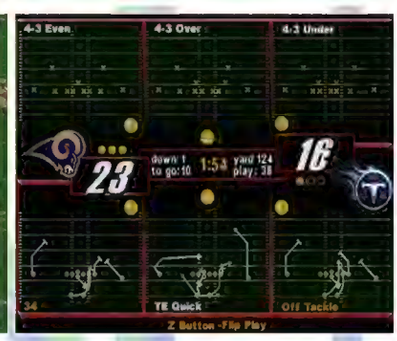
European Cartridge

NFL Quarterback Club 2001

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: High Voltage Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

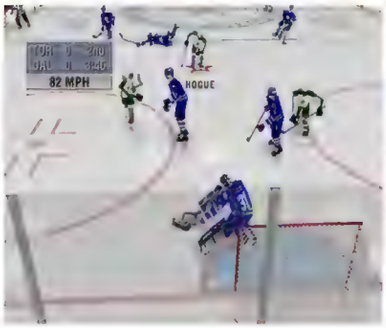
Discover your inner field general! This yearly gridiron effort highlights well-paced football with full NFL and NFLPA licenses. The crisp visuals stand out without slowdowns or animation glitches while playing. The default play perspective is angled up behind the offensive formation, but a dozen options range from an ultra-tight zoom to a blimp camera. The in-game football action is strong, with a good balance between running and passing effectiveness. The gameplay is streamlined – one button brings up passing icons, hand-offs to running backs are executed with realistic reliability, and receivers automatically catch balls thrown to them. There are small touches put into the experience, both positive and negative. Teams have individual offensive and defensive playbooks that reflect personnel, such as a specialty pass named after Drew Bledsoe in the New England Patriots' four-wide formation. Still, some teams lack even basic nickel and dime packages on defense. There are individual buttons for taunts after each play, though, which seems unnecessary, given how lacking other aspects are. Some defensive maneuvers have been added, like breaking through blocks and stripping the ball carrier, providing more depth for that side of the ball. Offensive moves for runners and receivers, like stiff arms, hurdling, and spin moves, are effective tools to evade would-be tacklers. A wide range of game modes are available – replay past Super Bowls; set up certain game situations to practice, like trailing at the end of the fourth quarter; complete a league-wide fantasy draft; or play through an NFL season, complete with stat tracking. Unfortunately, depth and accessibility are lacking. While player attributes can increase or decrease from game to game in season mode based on performance, there is no NFL Draft implementation or Franchise Mode for season-to-season progress. Roster and player management are also clunky, with cramped menus discouraging players from exploring trades and the free agency pool. The last of the series for the system, this 2001 installment offers a smooth football product that is sometimes undermined by its off-field performance.

Reflections: After a disastrous effort with Acclaim Studios Austin's *NFL Quarterback Club 2000*, this sequel from experienced outside developer High Voltage Software is a return to respectability. They mostly did so by removing needless "features" like additional passing meters and a catch button and smoothing the existing gameplay. The result is fun, one-off games to play solo or head-to-head. Unfortunately, you can feel the ground lost from that *2000* release – the season mode is unchanged from the *'99* installment – in direct comparison to the Madden series, or worse, NFL 2K on Dreamcast. This was the second-to-last Quarterback Club release. The final game for the series and another Acclaim Studios Austin effort, *NFL Quarterback Club 2002*, was released on PlayStation 2 and GameCube to middling reviews and third-place status, behind *Madden 2002* and *NFL 2K2*. – SG



NHL 99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Oct. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: EA Canada
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



Prodigious polygonal puck play prevails in this ambitious hockey offering. Captain one of 27 NHL squads or lead a team of international superstars in season, playoff, or tournament modes. Rookies (or veterans needing a refresher) can utilize a tutorial by Stanley Cup-winning coach Marc Crawford. Once on the ice, the gameplay is as smooth as an untouched sheet. Passes are crisp, checks are violent, and one-timers are explosive. The analog stick also feels responsive, smooth, and fair when controlling a skater. (When skating into a wall of defenders, it is typically the player's fault.) When receiving or delivering a check, the detection can be spotty, but it is a minor drawback, as the action overall is fast, crisp, and enjoyable. Several camera angles are available, including horizontal and vertical angled perspectives. When the view is behind the puck handler instead of observing from a high-up television broadcast perspective, players may find they play a little smarter, as they can see plays develop without being overwhelmed by the speed of the on-ice game. And the on-ice experience does move fast, from power plays and one-timing shots to defensive intercepting of passes and the occasional fistfight. Amateur managers will be especially satisfied in season mode. Trading players, signing free agents, and evaluating players riding hot or cold streaks add significant depth to an already gripping experience. The arena atmosphere in this title is second to none. Exuberant crowd noise, a lively organ during stoppages of play, and the play-by-play stylings of hockey lifer Bill Clement make every game feel essential (though a little Clement goes a long way). Those who simply want to coach a squad, though, will be left disappointed. Assuming the role of a bench boss is curiously absent in this otherwise deep sports title. Still, whether someone is familiar with a box +1 defensive strategy or wants to bump the difficulty down and light up goaltender Martin Brodeur a half-dozen times, there is some hockey gratification for almost everyone.

Reflections: *NHL 99* occupies a vital place in the history of hockey games, serving as a thematic bridge between the early generation and later releases that upped the realism and customization options. Titles like *Ice Hockey* and *Blades of Steel* on the NES started many players' video game hockey addictions early on, while *NHLPA '93* and *NHL '94* on the Sega Genesis and Super NES added licenses to deliver a more robust experience that stayed true to fast, fun, simple gameplay. Hockey titles today are more realistic and complex than in the early days. They often include a staggering number of customization features, a trend that arguably started with *NHL 99*. When it comes to a high fun factor with manageable depth, this still competes with the best of them. – KS

European Cartridge

NHL Blades of Steel '99

NHL Pro 99 (EU)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

A guitar-laden, high-octane introduction builds hype for this horizontal television-style hockey title featuring a full NHL team and players license. Exhibition offers a quick-play match, a playoff series option for Lord Stanley's Cup, or players can dig deeper by choosing a team, customizing nearly two dozen in-game options (difficulty, penalties, manual or automatic line changes, etc.), and starting a full 82-game season. The multiplayer options are numerous, allowing any combination of up to four human and CPU players. However, once the puck drops, it becomes clear that the gameplay experience is too underdeveloped to be all that enjoyable. Timing to hit the puck when the referee drops it is nearly impossible, as the frame rate makes the action twitchy. Even if players manage to do that, every in-game action feels sluggish, except for puck movement, which can be difficult to follow at times when shooting. Passing is also difficult to complete, as the intended recipient hardly ever gets control of the puck. If players forgo passing and try to carry the puck themselves, the AI of their own teammates has a habit of almost always staying ahead of them, forcing an offside. They either have to cross their fingers and try to pass forward or turn back and wait for players to get onside. This behavior creates a frustratingly monotone match with no thrills or excitement, just ho-hum ice skating and botched play attempts. The instant replay function is neat and shows the action from several angles. Regardless of what is being replayed, it can become annoying, and it can not be turned off (but skipped with a press of a button). Before commencing any match, some team management options are available, such as editing lines, strategy, trading players, creating players, and signing free agents. The Strategy option is a nice touch because it gives a clearly animated view and understanding of the available strategies, which can sometimes be tough for a hockey novice to understand. Player introductions also include a light show and awesome heavy metal music. Overall, the graphics are quite good, with clear logos and details, and the side-perspective overhead camera shows a clear view of a large portion of gameplay. There is also decent play-by-play announcing by Randy Hahn. However, these positives are a setup for disappointment as this never lives up to the bombastic tone set by the opening introduction.

Reflections: I had high hopes for this, probably due to overwhelming nostalgia for the original *Blades of Steel* (1988) on the NES. This 3D version seems to try to take itself too seriously with its simulation-style gameplay. It is almost as if the developers missed on implementing other factors that make a simulation game enjoyable, such as a smooth frame rate, advanced controls, and deeper management options. This title is not unplayable by any means, but it's just frustrating most of the time. – BC

European Cartridge
NHL Pro 99

NHL Breakaway 98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sculptured Software
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

With fast-paced, hard-hitting action and deep management options, this NHL-licensed hockey title offers a little something for everyone. Choose between Exhibition or Season modes, pick a favorite team, then sit back and enjoy the national anthem (or not by pushing any button). Right from puck drop, the vertical overhead-angle gameplay feels fast and responsive. While skaters have possession, it's easy to blast a slapshot from the point and go in for the rebound with a few quick button presses. On defense, press the turbo button to try and flatten an opponent with a body check. Be careful not to miss, as it can cause a player to be out of position. For a little more finesse while defending, try pressing the R button to skate backward to stay between the puck carrier and goalie (give them a little poke-check for good measure). Momentum swings in the game can provide teams with a boost by increasing their stamina. Enabling automatic line changes helps to keep fresh players on the ice and maintain a fast-paced game. Graphics are acceptable, and the puck is clearly visible (Fire puck and Glow puck can be toggled in the game options). The AI is decent, but sometimes computer-controlled skaters can get stuck in the boards or behind the net, which can be frustrating when players are trying to set up a rush play in the offensive zone. To dig deeper, create and trade players from the Roster screen or try Season mode to play or manage the team. Creating players can take some time, but it is a nice touch to be able to trade them all to a favorite team and dominate. In Season mode, playing games awards bonus points (if skipped, no bonus points are awarded), that can be spent on hiring new coaches, drafting and developing players, or healing injured players. Hiring better staff and recruiting players during season play is essential to go deep into the playoffs. This ice title holds something for the fresh rookie looking to cut their teeth in some quick head-to-head action while also appealing to the grizzled veteran who likes to hunker down with the satisfaction of an entire season.

Reflections: I was surprised to find *NHL Breakaway 98* a smooth-handling, fast-moving game, and I approve of the overhead camera angle. Regular gameplay can sometimes be a little repetitive, but fully utilizing bonus points during season play helps keep games fresh. There is something very satisfying about building up your team in season mode and becoming proficient in defense and one-timers. Oh, and the occasional big body check feels super nice, especially against your buddies on the couch. – BC

European Cartridge

NHL Breakaway 99

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana West
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

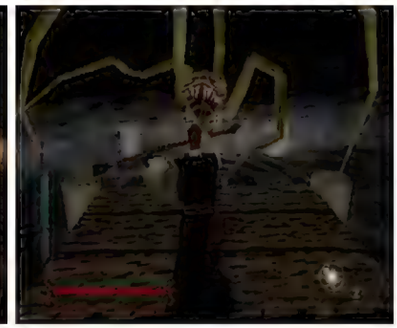
In this newest installment of the overhead ice hockey game series, players can take advantage of the newest team rosters, stats, and schedules for the 1999 NHL season. Exhibition, season, playoff, and practice modes all remain the same. The UI has also been freshened up, making viewing and navigating the main user interface slightly easier. This new season includes the addition of the Nashville Predators expansion team and the division realignment to accommodate them. Otherwise, this year's update remains unchanged regarding gameplay, features, and graphics compared to the previous season's entry. Please see the *NHL Breakaway 98* entry for a more detailed review.

Reflections: I prefer *NHL Breakaway 99* over *NHL Breakaway 98* because the 1999 rosters feel more familiar. It is still fun to play season mode, and if you want a little more hyperactivity like me, you can turn off fatigue and increase game speed in the settings menu. If you own *NHL Breakaway 98*, save your money unless you need to play as the Nashville Predators. – BC

European Cartridge

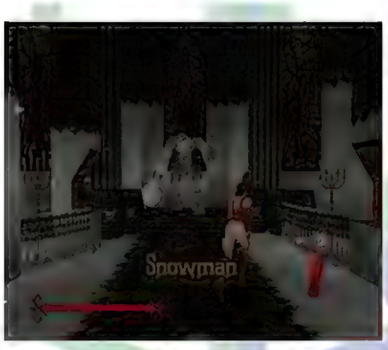
Nightmare Creatures

Genre: Action
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA
Developer: Kalisto Entertainment
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆



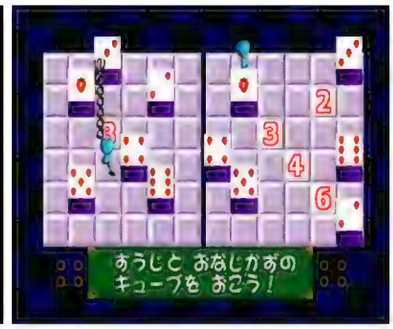
It's the year 1884, and mad scientist Adam Crowley has unleashed a demonic contagion into the streets of London, turning its inhabitants into grotesque, blood-thirsty monsters. In this horror-themed single-player 3D action title, players assume the roles of occult specialist Ignatius Blackward and biologist Nadia Franciscus, trying to stop Crowley and his army. Those who enjoy doling out heaps of damage will find much to like with the slower-moving Ignatius and his powerful staff. Players seeking a quicker-paced experience will benefit from the nimble swordswoman, Nadia. Both characters can pull off a hefty amount of combos and discover weapon upgrades that boost their damage output. An abundance of health and power-ups (such as freeze spells, dynamite, and proximity mines) are dropped by defeated creatures and hidden in breakable boxes. Enemies are the standard horror fare of zombies, werewolves, and other similar monsters, but later levels feature gigantic slimy behemoths that can withstand lots of damage. Most stages are giant and maze-like, but lost players can pull up a map screen anytime to reorient themselves. Locked doors and gates are plentiful, and the switches to these locks are usually (and inexplicably) on the other side of the map. Boss fights are a highlight and often require some form of light environmental puzzle-solving to conquer. The true enemy is the tank-like controls players must contend with to get their character (and the camera) facing the right way. The impressive visuals feature foggy London streets, dilapidated docks, goopy sewers, and gothic cemeteries. The moody soundtrack mixed with the growls of werewolves and zombies is easily the highlight of the experience. Still, the need to backtrack to a door after locating its switch and cumbersome tank-like controls cast a long shadow.

Reflections: *Nightmare Creatures* is a 3D action-horror title that would have greatly benefited from a second analog stick dedicated to camera control. The developers likely knew of the control limitations, so they frequently threw only one or two enemies at the player. This design choice would make controlling the action at least somewhat manageable. There are a few instances in the later parts where three enemies would ambush the player, and that's where the real frustration comes into play. If you want a real challenge, run straight through a level, and have several enemies follow you. That will test your patience to no end! – MV



Nintama Rantarō 64 Game Gallery

[Rantarō the Ninja Boy 64 Game Gallery]
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Apr. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Culture Brain
Publisher: Culture Brain
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Rare
Japanese Required: Low
☆

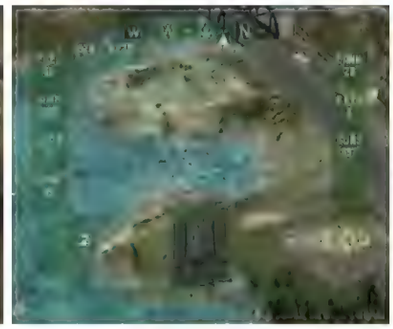


The popular, long-running children's anime series of the same name serves as inspiration for this straightforward puzzle title. The title consists of four simplistic mini-games featuring various characters from the series. In Fall and Plop!, picture panels fall over three silhouettes situated at the bottom of the screen. The goal is to rotate and move the panels until they line up over the matching outlines, ultimately filling in the silhouettes. Make more than three mistakes, and it's game over! An alternate timed mode is available and may be preferable upon discovering how easy the first mode is. In Quick Cube, the player manipulates cubed sections of a picture on a grid to recreate a small photo before the time runs out. Numerous obstacle cubes are positioned in the way; it takes some strategy to push, pull, and use ninja rope to move them into place. Two difficulty levels (with or without a guide photo) offer the slightest variety. Game three, Battle Quick Cube, requiring a similar movement of cubes on a grid into their proper location, is the only two-player option. In this mode, the first player to successfully complete four challenges presented at the bottom of the screen is the overall winner. Finally, in Exciting Jigsaw, the player moves pieces onto the play area to match the subject picture presented on the right in the shortest time possible. Unlike a typical jigsaw puzzle, all the piece shapes are perfect squares, yet another indicator of the lack of intended difficulty. There are 18 basic jigsaw puzzles in total to put together, but there's no motivation to complete them all beyond intense boredom. The title roughly translates to "Rantarō the Ninja Boy," a name that implies action and excitement. However, there is very little of either to be found here. Even fans of the anime series will discover minimal amusement within.

Reflections: The term "shovelware" gets thrown around too often when referring to any licensed game that reflects a lack of imagination and care. However, *Nintama Rantarō 64 Game Gallery* could fit just about anyone's definition. The rudimentary modes offered barely qualify as a coherent video game. It's essentially a collection of mini-games that you'd typically curse the developers for forcing you to complete in a terrible 8-bit adventure title. On the upside, the graphics are clear and bright, and the music is cheerful. Those are the only positives I can offer. Nothing special about the gameplay, graphics, or music requires this licensed mess to be developed for a 64-bit console, or any console, for that matter. – JBr

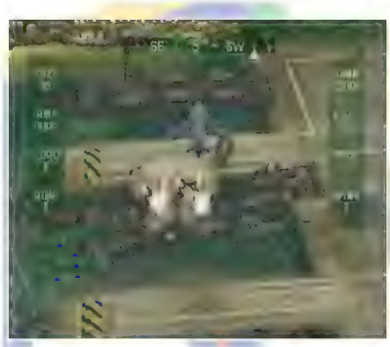
Nuclear Strike 64

Genre: Flight Combat, Vehicular Combat
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Pacific Coast Power and Light
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆



Nuclear terrorists threaten the globe! As a member of the secret Strike organization, the player must pilot their advanced Apache helicopter gunship through five missions in pursuit of mad former CIA agent Colonel LeMonde across Southeast Asia. The player will find themselves escorting ground troops, overseeing the evacuation of diplomats, destroying airfields and ICBM launch sites, and finally assaulting Col. LeMonde's fortress to prevent a nuclear apocalypse. The player may traverse the game's five levels, completing various scenarios and multiple mission objectives, using only the Apache or scouring the maps for alternatives. The controls are smooth and responsive. Aircraft can move in any horizontal direction, including strafing. Vertical movement is automatically handled so that it is impossible to crash. The top-down-angled perspective aids in navigating and engaging in fast-paced battles. Also available are other helicopters, such as the Comanche, as well as the AV-8 Sea Harrier and A10x Prototype Warthog planes. Vehicles are switched out via landing zones in stages. If found, three ground vehicles may also be utilized: a Bradley APC, an M1-HX Abrams tank, and a PACV Hovercraft, for 12 total vehicles. Controls for all are smooth and engaging. Each one bears slightly different weapons: guns, rockets, missiles, or wingtip missiles. Weapons, like armor and fuel, are a limited resource that must be used strategically. Guns are useful on foot soldiers, while missiles and rockets are most effective on tanks, helicopters, and buildings. Wingtip missiles are the most powerful, taking out most enemies in a single strike, but are also the most limited and difficult to find refills for. Item pickups refill that item to 100% and are not incremental, so players must decide the best time to refill to avoid waste. Unlike helicopters, ground vehicles cannot strafe, and each has quirks. For example, the hovercraft is slower over land, and the M1-HX Abrams tank's turret is controlled independently with the strafing controls. Alternate vehicles are usable only on the level where they are found and do not survive a player's death. The visuals presented are mixed. The vehicles are sharp and well-defined, but the ground below is somewhat blurry and muddy, though this clarity difference makes spotting enemies easier. This vehicular warfare experience offers quality controls and good mission variety and provides an energetic casual play experience to kill a few hours and some tanks.

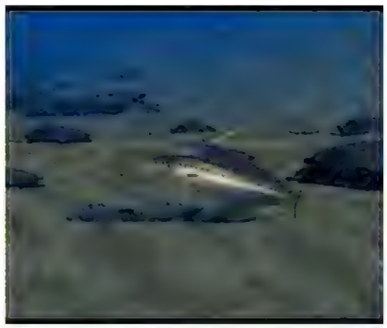
Reflections: *Nuclear Strike 64* provides a chance to smite a bunch of fools from the air in a plot that feels like Tom Clancy wrote a G.I. Joe miniseries. The additional vehicles that can be found break up the action with new and interesting challenges. However, while fun and challenging, the entry in the Strike series lacks much of what made the PlayStation and PC versions of *Nuclear Strike* appealing. Gone are the cutscenes and the real-time-strategy control during the Korean DMZ section, leaving the player to merely hover over allied tanks and deploy them automatically. While longtime fans of the Strike series may not find it as robust an experience as they might hope, this remains a fun and unique entry in the N64 library that is worth spending some explosion-filled hours with. – CW



European Cartridge

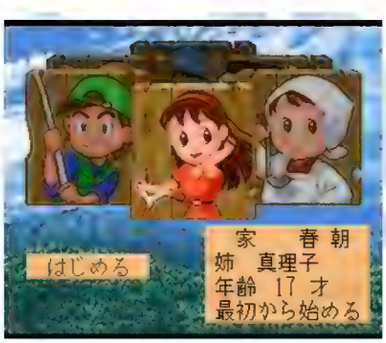
Nushi Tsuri 64

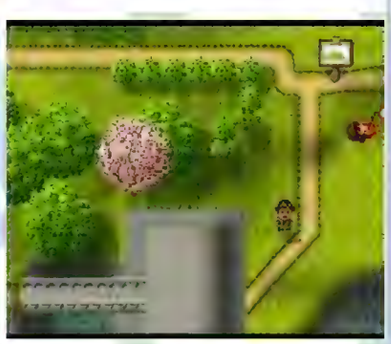
[Fishing Master 64]
Genre: Sports, Simulation
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Victor Interactive Software
Publisher: Victor Interactive Software
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆



Experience the pleasures and perils that nature presents on a quest to capture the elusive "River King." Most of this experience is enjoyed from an overhead 2D view as the player controls one of six characters traversing a gorgeous community packed to the gills with NPCs, flora, and fauna. The player can fish at their leisure, using a single button to reel one in. After hooking a fish, the overhead view is eschewed for an underwater camera, where there is a closer 3D view of the prey. When without a rod in hand, there is gardening to be done. In every location, encounters appear as stills with a list of actions the player can carry out. They can find flowers to snip or water and insects to eliminate or release. While engaging in these peaceful activities, the player also encounters some critters across their path. They can feed them, fight them, or simply run away. Players can squeeze out hours of enjoyment by engaging in the outlined activities, but there is a story here. Each character is pursuing a different fish for a different reason. For example, the young girl is after the Golden Nijimasu at the request of her cat, Zapp. Players can sell fish and flowers and upgrade gear while engaging in the five main quests that comprise the storyline. These quests involve collecting fish, flowers, and various other items at the request of characters they come across in their travels. Completing these quests and catching the target fish concludes the story, which is unique to each character. As time passes, each in-game day (about an hour of real-time) is equivalent to two weeks, and the seasons change, which can open new events and allow the completion of specific quests that can only be completed during a particular time of year. Each of the ten areas the player can explore features different fish, flowers, and bugs depending on the season. There are items that the player can obtain that make the passage of time much easier to monitor and control, like the watch and alarm clock. A particularly helpful item is the bicycle, which is a fantastic help for traversing the impressively expansive land. With the Transfer Pak, players can connect *Umi No Nushi Tsuri 2* (Game Boy) to import caught fish for viewing and unlock a new fish to catch. This simulation offers many activities that can appeal to various players, all wrapped in an entertaining story. Whether interested in fighting, fishing, or fiddling with flowers, everyone will likely find something that suits their tastes.

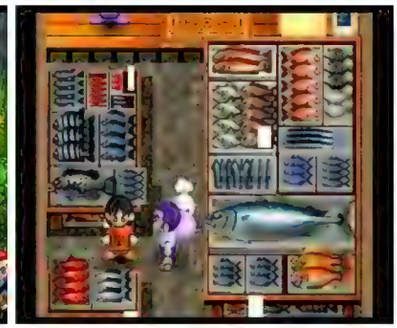
Reflections: *Nushi Tsuri 64* is an offshoot of the Kawa no Nushi Tsuri [Fishing the River Master] series of games, which began on the Famicom in 1990 and includes over 15 games. A few titles in the series were localized in North America: *Legend of the River King* (Game Boy, Game Boy Color), *Legend of the River King 2* (Game Boy Color), *River King: A Wonderful Journey* (PS2), and *River King: Mystic Valley* (DS). I am not fluent in Japanese, which makes *Nushi Tsuri 64* all the more impressive. I played this game for an entire weekend using a translation app and enjoyed it thoroughly before I realized there was a story to enjoy. I think that's indicative of a quality game. While knowing the language to progress through the storyline is necessary, you certainly don't have to. The fishing is simple. Gardening is simple. Sometimes, video games are just better when they're simple. – KS





Nushi Tsuri 64: Shiokaze Ninotte

[Fishing Master 64: Riding the Sea Breeze]
Genre: Sports, Simulation
Release Date: May 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Victor Interactive Software
Publisher: Victor Interactive Software
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆



Ditch the river for the sea in this sequel to the 1998 release *Nushi Tsuri 64*. Watch from an overhead view while controlling one of four characters through a tropical 2D overworld bursting at the seams with fish, flowers, friends, and foes. The main activity of fishing is a simple process where the quality of the tackle is the most critical element influencing whether a fish is reeled in. When a fish is on the hook, the view changes to a realistic 3D underwater side view of the creature attached to the line. The truly intrepid angler can opt to utilize the Tsurikon 64, a controller that mimics a rod and reel for a more authentic experience. Each character pursues underwater inhabitants for a different reason, like Yumiko, the mother, who wants the ultimate ingredient in fish cuisine to bring luck to her family. Such a task requires purchasing better gear, which they can procure after selling the fish caught near villages. Adequate stamina is needed to keep up with all that fishing, so grab a bite from one of the village vendors or crash at the inn to replenish it. While fishing occupies plenty of the gameplay, there are other activities. At any time, bug-catching with the trusty net or snipping rare and beautiful flowers is an option. The collect-a-thon available here is a diversion all on its own, but parting with some of those prizes in pursuit of the ultimate trophy is necessary. Just as prominent to a character's success as fishing is thoughtfully exchanging wares in the village. For a quick break, jump into a game of Kakuchikku to earn some jewels. It is a simple board game that involves placing colored, numbered tiles on a grid to outscore the competition's adjacent tiles and capture that spot. For all the activities provided, jumping in and out of fishing, bug-catching, and flower-snipping could not be easier. The controls feel great, with the accessibility of only two buttons needed for the shining fishing mechanics, and the learning curve is virtually non-existent. The Transfer Pak can be used to send the progress charted here to *Kawa no Nushi Tsuri 4* (Game Boy Color) and unlock a new fish to catch. Likable characters, compelling storylines, and simple but engaging gameplay add up to an experience that a wide variety of players can enjoy.

Reflections: Like with the original *Nushi Tsuri 64*, you must read some Japanese to progress through the sequel's story. But little language knowledge is required to aimlessly enjoy the activities presented in this lush, leisurely environment. The menus are littered with symbols, so you'll find what you're looking for with trial and error. I tested this, asking my 3-year-old, Hope, to point to the fishing rod on my first play-through. Within a couple of days, she knew the drop-down menu where the rod was located. My reward for this experiment in child psychology? A week of my daughter waking me up with the exclamation, "DADDY, LET'S FISH!" – KS

This title was advertised as being compatible with the Tsuricon 64 fishing rod and reel controller.

Off Road Challenge

Genre: Racing
Release Date: June 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Studios San Diego
Ported by: Avalanche Software
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

Prepare to muddy the tires in this all-terrain 3D racing port of the arcade title. Four default vehicles (three trucks and a dune buggy) are here for mostly offroad enjoyment, with four additional ones available by pressing a C-button at the selection screen. All vary in speed, power, handling, and weight, drastically altering the performance depending on the terrain being raced. After choosing automatic or manual transmission (higher top speed), it is time to tackle one of the six default courses, like the desert track of Mojave, the backwoods of Ol' South, or the snowy mountain roads of Pike's Peak. In selectable third- or first-person viewpoints, players rally race through checkpoints to increase the time and finish in a decent place. Racing over bumps, holes, and other dirty hazards is rudimentary and mostly bereft of the need for technical skill – simply stay on course and outrun/smash through the other seven opponents on the way. Unfortunately, the tough opponent AI combined with the inadequacy of the default vehicles makes placing in even third place a difficult chore. To complicate races, they feature nuisances that may run into the player's vehicle, like a train, wagon cart, boulders, or even an airplane flying at it. Two nitro boosts are provided per race to help, and more can be picked up on the course, but the opponents use them as well, making their collection and utilization a necessity just to remain competitive. Even clean racing may not be enough. Fortunately, the truck can be upgraded (acceleration, shocks, speed, tires, additional nitro boosts) between races via cash garnered through finishes and by picking up $40,000 treasure chests on the courses. However, money accumulates too slowly to keep the vehicle tuned up on the Circuit mode, where players cycle through the courses up to four times. In the first round, finish at least fourth to continue, at least third place in the second round, at least second place in the third round, and first place in the final round. The second through fourth rounds each add an additional course, but there may be no desire to race them in this underpowered wreck.

Reflections: The arcade's *Off Road Challenge* was built upon the Midway V Unit hardware, the same used for *Cruis'n USA* and *Cruis'n World*. By the late '90s, it was starting to show its age. This port offers none of the extra niceties or bonuses you would expect based upon those Midway home versions, which is a disappointment but not shocking given that those were both published by Nintendo, who would never have shipped such a shoddy experience like this under their banner. I have to at least shout out Midway Studios San Diego for having one of the bonus racers being the Thunder Bolt, a truck using the NFL team colors of the Chargers as well as a lightning bolt, like the team formerly from San Diego does. – PC

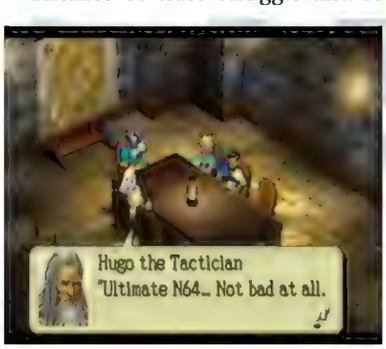
European Cartridge

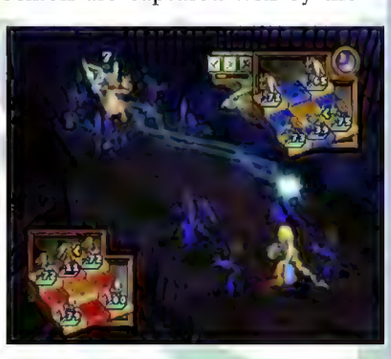
Ogre Battle 64: Person of Lordly Caliber

Genre: Strategy, RPG
Release Date: Oct. 2000
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Quest, Dual
Publisher: Atlus (NA), Nintendo (JP)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

From military graduate to rebellion leader, Magnus seeks to deliver the nation of Palatinus from evil and discover his mother's fate in this epic turn-based strategy RPG. Play consists primarily of selecting locations to travel to on an overhead world map, then taking command of one or more armies to explore or conquer the area. In these areas, the colorful sprites of their leaders represent army units, and the terrain is a somewhat realistic mix of natural topography and objectives like towns and castles, reinforcing the medieval fantasy theme. Magnus' army is divided into customizable units of one to five characters arranged on a three-by-three grid. These formations include characters like the hot-headed Dio or experienced Hugo, generic combatants like Knights or Amazons, and monsters ranging from zombies to dragons. Players command units on the battlefield, giving instructions to move to waypoints or explore settlements. These scenarios often have unique objectives, including defending a stronghold, eliminating an enemy, and preventing Magnus from dying. Real-time battles begin when allied and enemy units converge on the map. Players make small tactical decisions, such as deciding on the prioritization of attack, when to retreat, or when to employ a powerful Elem Pedra elemental attack. A charging meter in the top-right corner of the battle screen determines when tactical options become available. Maneuvers are slow, so patience is required when watching forces saunter toward objectives. Units are managed on the world map between missions, including adjusting equipment, distributing items, rearranging unit formations, resupplying units with soldiers, and more. The army's equipment serves to do more than improve stats – unit members with a specific level, alignment, and gender can change class to one of the dozens of potential unit types, such as the versatile Paladin or lethal Lich, once obtaining its equipment. Each class features a particular combination of abilities, so optimizing units by class, alignment, and position is key to success. The ability to return to previous zones to explore means commanders can focus on the battle without worrying about missing valuable discovered items. Themes of class struggle and rebellion are captured well by the dialog and story scenes between missions. Unit artwork is distinct and easily recognized, and the sprite work is impressive. Endings vary widely thanks to Chaos Frame, a hidden attribute based on the heroes recruited and Magnus' popularity from towns liberated or conquered. Toss in well-orchestrated tunes, and there is plenty of replay value for generals eager to get lost in Palatinus over and over.

Reflections: Series progenitor Yasumi Matsuno does not appear in the credits of *Ogre Battle 64*, as he took a director-level position with Square to work on titles like *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Vagrant Story* for the PlayStation years before they acquired Quest in 2002. His fingerprints are nevertheless all over *Ogre Battle 64*, which effectively channels the themes of his work. There's a real depth to the mechanics (alignment and promotion in particular) that takes both reading the manual and spending hours in the game to master. This is time well spent, as players won't be able to recruit everyone and see everything this content-rich saga has to offer in just one playthrough. – DG

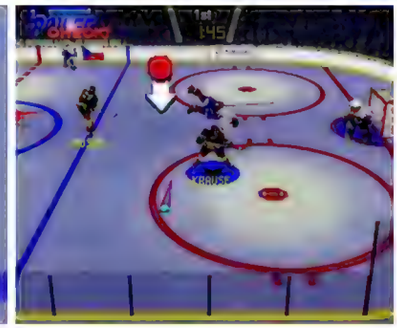




Japanese Cartridge

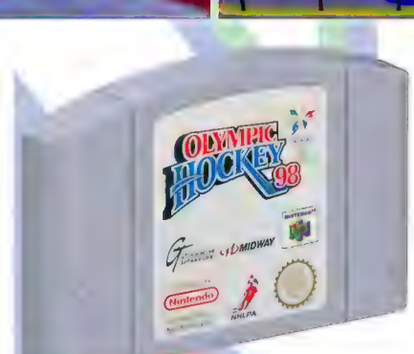
Olympic Hockey Nagano '98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Feb. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Treyarch Invention
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆



Tape up that stick and go for gold in the 1998 Men's Olympic Ice Hockey Tournament in Nagano, Japan. Each of the 14 countries that competed in the 1998 Winter Olympics is present, complete with their full rosters. The action can be played from seven side- or top-view options available via the menu. There are five modes to choose from: Exhibition, Arcade, Qualify, Finals, & Playoffs. Exhibition mode offers quick games and is the only mode featuring four-player simultaneous play. In Arcade, players pick a country and must defeat every other country to win the gold. Qualify mode has the player choosing from one of eight teams to compete in the qualifying rounds. Finals is an eight-team, single-elimination tournament where the winner takes the gold. Finally, in Playoff mode, eight teams compete in a round-robin tournament, which decides the teams that make it to the finals. Each mode can be played as an arcade or simulation game, toggled in the options menu. Players who enjoy their hockey at break-neck speeds with slap shots that break the sound barrier will get the most out of Arcade. Meanwhile, Simulation does its best to resemble actual Olympic Hockey (though it ultimately fails due to the abundance of bone-rattling checks and superhuman goaltenders). Both modes have a rechargeable speed burst and feature fighting, triggered by players' Anger Meter. Other in-game tweaks include changing the team size (three, four, or five players, plus the goalie), rink size (smaller arcade or Olympic regulation), difficulty, and speed. Oddly enough, player stats may be edited, and roster changes can also be made by trading players to other countries, which certainly is not a feature rooted in realism. To hone on-ice skills, Practice is available. The audio includes each country's anthem before the start of games, and overly excited play-by-play announcing by Tim Kitzrow seems out of place in Simulation games but is right at home in Arcade. The visuals feature behemoth robot-like-looking players and pucks that leave a vibrant purple streak when passed or shot. Olympic hockey fans looking for a realistic experience will be disappointed with this title, but arcade hockey enthusiasts may find a lot to like.

Reflections: Talk about copy and paste! *Olympic Hockey Nagano '98* is an almost exact replica of *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98*. The only things that changed were the rosters, jerseys, and some board and on-ice graphics. Even the menu screens and their sound effects are exactly the same. Come on, at least switch out the announcer! And hey, did you memorize the cheat codes from *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98*? Then you're in luck because they're still here, completely unchanged. Now that I think about it, *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98* could be considered a duplicate of the original *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey*, making *Olympic Hockey Nagano '98* a second-level clone. We have some real video game hockey *Inception* happening here. – MV

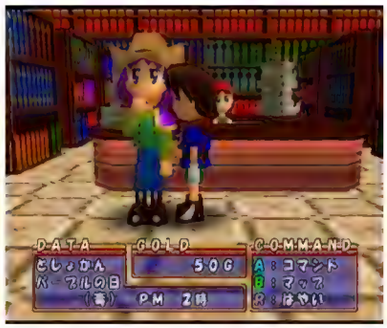


European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Onegai Monsters

[Wish Monsters]
Genre: Strategy, RPG
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Bottom Up
Publisher: Bottom Up
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆



On the continent of Brighton lies Pastelup Castle Town, where players can choose to control ten-year-old Frey or his sister, Clara, to begin their journey as a monster breeder. It starts with them receiving a monster egg, which soon hatches into a newborn slime creature. Frey or Clara can venture into local town shops to procure food for their monster and assign daily feeding schedules. Most nourishment corresponds to seven elements: fire, water, poison, medicine, earth, wind, and mineral. Repeated feedings will increase their power level and evolve them based on the element of their primary nutrition. If players do not monitor their food carefully, monsters may catch a cold and suffer consistent HP loss until their diet is successfully modified. There are 500 monsters to discover and evolve into, which opens up all kinds of experimentation. Players can purchase additional eggs and breed multiple monsters before sending them to compete in arena battles or out into the continent to search for items. There are also 53 requests to fulfill for the citizens of Pastelup, consisting of tasks like searching for unique recipe ingredients or vanquishing specific monsters. Town exploration happens from a horizontal perspective, while battles occur from an isometric camera. While in combat, monsters can move forward or backward, defend, charge, attack, or unleash a special elemental attack. Exploring the town, continental navigation, and battles are all functionally sluggish and will test players' patience. The continental map shows icons for other towns, but bafflingly, that is for decoration only, as Pastelup is the only town to visit. There is no proper ending, as there is no main story arc; players are primarily encouraged to continue breeding more monsters, and the request list is treated more like optional side quests than a core narrative. The unimpressive graphical design and soundtrack do not help either. A second user can load up their saved data of monsters to trade with or compete against in standalone battles. There is some enjoyment in testing out various monster evolutions and knocking out requests for locals. However, that eventually wears thin when factoring in the gameplay hiccups and the absence of a central storyline.

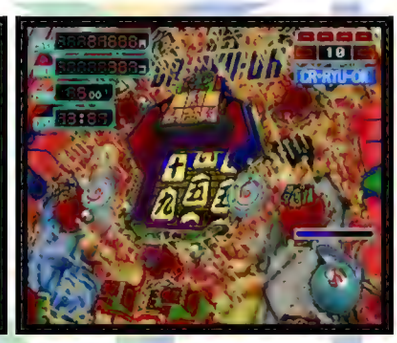
Reflections: I would be lying if I did not admit I took advantage of a handy save anytime feature that is a big help when testing countless diet patterns. I would also recommend taking advantage of the fast-forwarding time option to speed up traversing Brighton or holding R to perform an amusing speed walk across Pastelup. *Onegai Monsters* was one of many monster-raising clones to be released during the initial wave of Pokèmon fever. Unlike other competing series like Digimon and Monster Rancher, this brand never caught on and would be the only Onegai Monsters title released. – DK

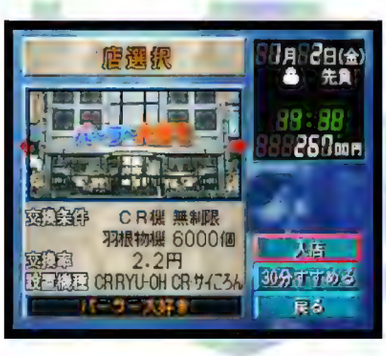
Pachinko 365 Nichi

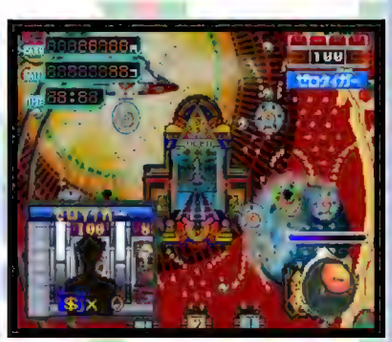
[Pachinko 365 Days]
Genre: Pachinko, Gambling
Release Date: May 1998
Region: JP
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆

Load up, dial back, and start launching! This simulator authentically recreates a pachinko parlor experience, from its head-on perspective to finessing the shifting power dial. In pachinko, players launch a number of metal balls into a machine filled with obstructing pins in an attempt to land them in high-scoring containers at the bottom. The skill element derives from players carefully finessing the power dial on the ball launcher. During play, the UI shows the amount of money and balls the player has, the amount left on a card, session length, any active jackpots, and the ball release lever. Some tables feature different mechanics – for example, matching symbols on tables with slots can result in payout mode, unlocking gates that award a high number of additional balls when scored. There are three modes of play: Simulation, Machine Research, and Battle. Simulation Mode challenges players to earn as much money as they can in 365 days across three parlors, given 30,000 yen each month. Parlors offer subsets of five official Heiwa brand pachinko machines – the 7/11 models PeachPie V, RYU-OH, Cyclone, and Feather Products' Zero Tiger and Tulip's Center Chu Stone. Daily events, fluctuating jackpot rates, rotating machines with inspectable conditions, and customer chatter can influence how and where players get their best chances of winning. Pachinko Research Mode lets the player carefully inspect and experiment with each machine, studying it to discern optimal play strategies. Machines can also be tweaked, allowing players to adjust the angle and firmness of nails, spinners, and bonus odds. Finally, Battle Mode allows a player to go head-to-head with a human or CPU opponent on the classic Center Chu Stone machine. The player who gets the most balls within a set time wins. While this playground is designed to let players get lost in the world of pachinko, limited machines and minimal variance in play hold back all but the most enthusiastic of players.

Reflections: *Pachinko 365 Nichi* tries to be two things simultaneously – a casual simulator for those interested in playing these machines and a trainer for enthusiasts who want to study and practice them before playing their real equivalents. I'm equally impressed at how much effort the Simulation mode goes through to recreate the idiosyncrasies of playing pachinko as more than a simple pastime and depressed at the notion of doing it. While other games conjure a fantastic or glamorous veneer around their gambling, *Pachinko 365 Nichi*'s insular and heavily-grounded world feels closer to an addiction simulator than something enchanting – in a way that probably shouldn't be aspired to. – DG







Paper Mario

Mario Story (JP)
Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: Feb. 2001
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

When Bowser steals the wish-granting Star Rod and kidnaps Princess Peach, Mario must embark on an epic journey to get them both back. Replete with personality, this experience features RPG elements and light platforming in a colorful 2.5D world. On the field, Mario talks to characters, jumps, spin-dashes, swings his hammer, and uses special abilities to find his way forward. He also meets unique characters and assists them by defeating enemies or bringing them certain objects. Some of these folks join his party and lend a hand, both on the field and in battle. For example, Bombette blows open walls, Lakilester levitates Mario over dangerous terrain, and Kooper snags distant items. While exploring, he encounters enemies such as Shy Guys, Fuzzies, Pokeys, and Paragoombas patrolling the roads and dungeons. They rush him if he gets too close, but he can always try to attack first to gain the upper hand. Battles are 2D and fully turn-based, and Mario and a partner take turns attacking or using items against their opponents. Mario can stomp or swing his hammer, though some enemies are immune to one or the other. His partners have unique abilities and attacks, like Goombario providing intel on enemies or Sushie shooting water jets. Action commands add interactivity, so combat is not just selecting from a menu. For instance, pressing A at the right moment increases the damage dealt. Button presses can also be timed to avoid or reduce damage when attacking. Character stats include Heart Points (HP) for health and Flower Points (FP) for special attacks.

After winning a battle, Mario gains Star Points that build towards a stat-boosting level-up, then returns to the field in a shower of coins, HP, and FP recovery items. Mario also equips unique items tied to Badge Points (BP) that grant new attacks, bonus stats, and more. As he rescues lost Star Spirits, they teach him powerful attacks and skills. Finishing a story chapter presents a brief interlude where the player controls Princess Peach to spy on Bowser in his castle. She does not brawl but has puzzle-like adventures that add gameplay variety, like when she sneaks around to eavesdrop on soldiers. The entire adventure centers around Toad Town as a hub of sorts; it connects to almost every other area of the Mushroom Kingdom, including Flower Fields, Lavalava Island, and Forever Forest. It is filled with shops that sell badges, mushrooms, and other offensive and defensive items. The more Mario explores, the more colorful characters he encounters, like friendly Goombas, ghosts, and Bob-ombs. The paper-diorama visual style, humor, and satisfying music and sound effects make this a polished classic, and the gameplay is so rewarding that players are motivated to find all of the side quests and hidden items.

Reflections: Mario canon has always been fancifully fickle, with differing names, designs, timelines, and translations over the decades. In the early 2000s, Nintendo was slowly moving away from this to build a consistent, curated brand. Paper Mario himself is probably a separate character from the mainline Mario. However, the game *Paper Mario* took a big step towards this consistency, featuring more in-depth characterization and detailed world-building. Following its sequel, *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door* on GameCube, subsequent titles in the series veered away from core RPG elements in favor of the casual action-RPG design. Fans were disappointed, but the *Paper Mario*-inspired Mario & Luigi RPG series absorbed most of those elements. Even after all these years, *Paper Mario* is still an excellent introductory RPG. It discourages repetitive grinding with its simplified leveling system and keeps the journey focused on story and gameplay, not dominating the battlefield. Decades later, fans of the series still happily dissect the original Paper Mario. To me, that's a true testament to Paper Mario's lasting entertainment value. – KN

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Mario Story

Paperboy

Genre: Action
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: High Voltage Software
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Paperboy is back on the block! Players take control of the eponymous boy (or girl!) to deliver Daily Sun newspapers to customers in 3D third-person stages. Paperboy can pedal his bicycle through twelve quirky neighborhoods, such as Raybob's Junkyard or Mt. Kablooie. He can roam stages freely with the ability to aim and throw newspapers with either the L/R buttons (side aiming) or the Z button (free aiming). It takes a little getting used to, but it is a satisfactory gameplay mechanic. Delivering newspapers to customers' doorsteps results in four seconds added to the game clock, five for a mailbox throw, and six for a long-range mailbox toss. While trying to deliver the daily news (with a customer arrow and minimap to help), Paperboy is harassed by a steady stream of stage-specific obstacles and enemies. These include grumpy pedestrians, annoying critters, cars, death ray-wielding aliens, the Grim Reaper, fire-breathing gargoyle lawn ornaments, Bigfoot(!), and many more. Paperboy can fight back by tossing papers to stop these foes, but 10-paper bundles must be collected to stay stocked. The ability to do jumps and tricks for bonus seconds is helpful, and map shortcuts and secrets are plentiful. Health pickups, additional time, longer tossing power, turbo boost, spring jump, and even a monster potion can be obtained to help the Paperboy do his job. The successful neighborhood runs result in additional customers being unlocked and also add to the overall delivery counter, which is necessary to make more neighborhoods available. Each has a bonus stage that can be accessed by hitting objects to collect three hidden coins; an obstacle course, race while avoiding tornadoes, and collecting frogs are just a few of these diversions. The presentation is amusing, with humorous Daily Sun headlines and pictures setting the tone before each stage run, and the campy humor makes even frustrating sections easier to digest. The graphics are extremely crude yet stylized, but the view distance is poor. The music is cheery and upbeat, the sound effects are goofy, the secret codes are fun, and a few boss battles and a loose narrative help. While technically nothing special, this charming diversion delivers just enough smiles to earn a trial subscription.

Reflections: Originally an excellent 1985 Atari arcade title, *Paperboy* had an NES port and a Super NES sequel before finding its way to the N64. The first Alphaville neighborhood is referential to the original game's neighborhood block in both its look and the adversaries encountered. In fact, other foes from the original show up in this version but in different stages. I have to reiterate how amusing and clever the newspaper headlines are; some made me laugh out loud. Kudos to High Voltage for putting some extra thought into this production while honoring the spirit of silliness and irreverence of the original. – PC

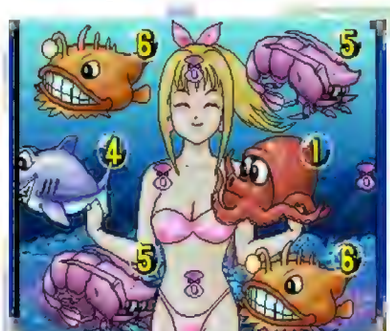
European Cartridge

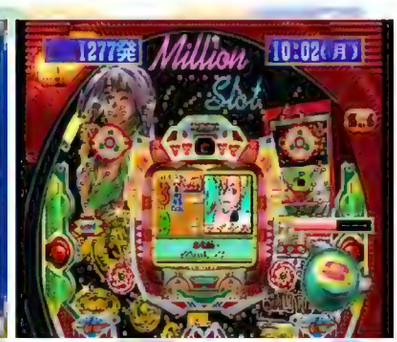
Parlor! Pro 64: Pachinko Jikki Simulation Game

[Parlor! Pro 64: Real Pachinko Machines Simulation Game]
Genre: Pachinko
Release Date: Jan. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Telenet Japan
Publisher: Telenet Japan
Players: 1
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆

Three authentic mid-'90s SANYO brand tables are featured in this faithful 2D recreation of the Japanese pastime. The player must exchange currency for small balls, which they then shoot into the machine's playing area with a pinball-like plunger. Launch velocity can be adjusted to try and hit different bumpers and spots in the playing field, aiming for reward areas while avoiding draining at the bottom. Like in real-life pachinko, players receive prize balls for getting into a reward area. Each of the three tables features a theme: CR Mr. Gen the Carpenter (based on *Hammerin' Harry*, a 1990 side-scrolling beat-'em-up by Irem), the aquatic world of CR Gingira Paradise, and the high-stakes CR Million Slots 6. Three modes of play are included: Strategy, Hall, and Gallery. In Strategy mode, the player can learn and modify each machine. Bumper placement and rigidity can be tweaked to adjust the machine's feel. Fiddling with these settings makes it easier to see the power needed to hit targets and which machine layouts are most advantageous. In Hall Mode, the player is given 100,000G and tasked with doubling it in a week to join the exclusive "Water Margin" group. Players can go to one of four pachinko parlors, each with different business hours and cash layouts. Parlors are explored in a first-person 3D perspective, each with its combination of machines and layouts. A smooth and intuitive menu lets players toggle between machines, see the highlighted variance in pin configurations, and know which are paying out jackpots. Combined with knowledge gleaned from Strategy mode, this is a great way to find unoccupied machines paying bigger returns. Finally, Gallery mode lets players enjoy the cinematics of the tables without needing to play. The UI tracks the remaining shots, slot pulls and wins, the ball launcher's power, and the date/time for Hall Mode. The machine recreations are accurate, while the music is hit-or-miss, so some players may want to bring their own tunes for longer play sessions. Three Hall Mode saves can be put on a Controller Pak or one on the Game Pak itself. While the table selection is modest, pachinko fans looking for a casual foray into ball-launching have just enough to enjoy.

Reflections: For those looking for the parlor experience at home, *Parlor! Pro 64: Pachinko Jikki Simulation Game* offers plenty of silver-ball gaming with none of the secondhand smoke. It's rather dramatic to name your secret club of gamblers after the *Suikoden* legend, but hey, PS1 on the brain? This is, after all, a port of the PlayStation version, *Parlor! Pro*, from two years prior. While we're on the topic of silver balls, how did the N64 not have a single pinball game released for it? Digital Eclipse's *Addams Family Pinball* recreation was the closest we came, and it never made it out of development. – DG





PD Ultraman Battle Collection 64

Genre: Strategy, RPG
Release Date: July 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Produce!
Publisher: Bandai
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Transfer Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆

Collect, raise, and battle with the myriad creatures of the Ultra Series in this monster training game. The primary mode drops one player in the Gashapon Tower as Ultraman and tasks them with defending the world against aliens, kaiju, and other threats. Each in-game day, the player can tell Ultraman and any other deployed creatures they have collected to visit locations on the map, explore, play, train, rest, or use any owned items. Specific commands may result in a one-on-one turn-based battle against an enemy creature. In battle, the player's monsters have ratings for HP, strength, and happiness, as well as one of six elemental attributes that function as a rock-paper-scissors style strength and weakness system. Battle Skills are also based on elemental types, so more than simply picking the right creature to battle with, using the correctly typed skills against specific foes helps the player win. Fighting earns money to be spent on collecting characters and buying items and is how creatures gain levels, increasing statistics. Higher-level creatures can also be tailored to focus on specific features, such as speed or defense. The player can acquire creatures one of two ways – via a gashapon-style vending machine that spits out a random creature or through the one shining novelty – using the Transfer Pak. With it, players can generate creatures from any Game Boy cartridge, which provides a random seed for the creature creator. In addition to the main game, if two players each have Controller Pak saves, Match Mode allows them to engage in simple battles with the creatures in their respective collections. While there are some sound conceptual ideas here, there are struggles with their execution. At lower levels, the pace of the stamina bar can be maddening, making battles feel more like staring contests than actual bouts. Plodding animations, poorly tuned combat, and a weak audiovisual presentation are some of the numerous shortcomings preventing this battling RPG from delivering an ounce of entertainment.

Reflections: While it might look like an Ultra Series-themed *Pokémon Stadium* at first glance, the better parallel to *PD Ultraman Battle Collection 64* is Tecmo's Monster Rancher series. The comparison is especially true considering that the series' hallmark usage of bytecode from random discs for its monster generator function clearly parallels this game's use of the Transfer Pak. Sadly, unlike those other two titles, there is very little fun to be found here. While the gimmick of collectible chibi Ultraman characters sounds appealing, attempting to play this pedestrian, sluggish mess is a test of willpower and nothing more. Even die-hard fans of the Ultra Series might be better off leaving this one on the shelf. – DG

Penny Racers

Choro Q 64 (JP)
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Locomotive
Publisher: THQ (NA, PAL), Takara (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

Rank up through four difficulty classes to become the best driver around in this cartoonish racer based on the Japanese toy cars. Races consist of three laps on each of nine tracks, all from a third-person perspective using one of 13 cars or trucks (with an extra unlockable). Before and in between races, points can be assigned to customize the car to improve its performance by upgrading brakes, tires, etc., adding cosmetic extras, and a weapon. Driving controls are responsive, and advanced techniques like drifting and rolling functions can be useful for tight turns. During races, CPU drivers smash each other all over the screen but recover quickly, even on the lower difficulty, making some rounds feel difficult to beat. Some stages have lava pits, spike traps, and ice hazards, which can grind the action to a halt, adding even more frustration. Modifying cars for the next selected race is essential, for example, choosing snow tires for the Alpine track. Some parts can both help and hinder driving capabilities. For example, a new engine may have better acceleration but lower top speed, and adding the bumper will add protection from ramming and other attacks. Building a vehicle that can take corners by adding better suspension is essential, as the courses have tight bends, which can prove troublesome for starter vehicles. Even with the right upgrades, cars can often skid and roll, losing precious seconds. Weapons such as missiles and landmines have finite use during a race, but extra ammo is rewarding when completing a lap. Be sure not to lag since drivers that finish in the top three can take an item/part from one of the 4th-6th placed racers, so watch out! Saving and loading different custom cars is a nice feature, including the ability to choose a custom color and name for the creation. Two core modes offer a basic Time Trial experience and Race Series that supports up to four-player split-screen action. There's also a VS Race mode for quick runs for three or more human players and New Track, which lets players create custom courses. This concept is a unique idea for a racer, but the experience is severely flawed thanks to a needlessly obtuse item system and computer opponents that are incredibly aggressive.

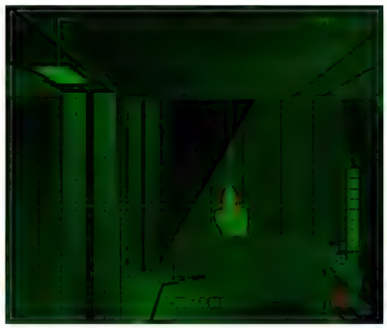
Reflections: One of the most promising features in *Penny Racers* is also its most disappointing – stealing opponents' items. Not including a stat screen showing what each part does is inexcusable, as there isn't room for experimentation, and a manual or guide is not always handy. You have to equip your item, then go into a race blindly. If you lose (which you might if your item is terrible), your opponent can steal one of your better items, thus punishing you for just trying to understand the game. The rest of the racing experience is passable but fairly vanilla. It's just a shame this one feature was handled so poorly. – JE

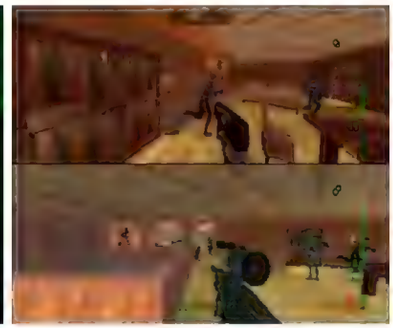
European Cartridge

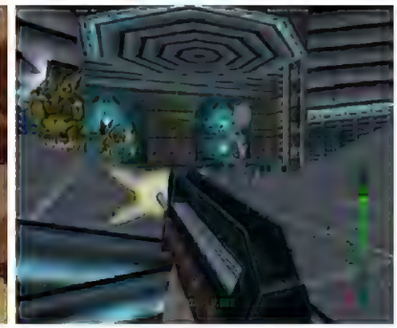
Japanese Cartridge
Choro Q 64

Perfect Dark

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: May 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Rareware
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak, Expansion Pak (required)
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆







Joanna Dark, Carrington Institute's super-spy scholar, is assigned her first official mission in this first-person shooter that has her navigating the globe and galaxy to rescue confidential allies, retrieve highly dangerous weaponry and technology, and ultimately save the universe. The Carrington Institute headquarters serves as a traversable hub where training missions, information profiles, and the core single and multiplayer content can be accessed. The facility can be used to become accustomed to one of eight preset control layouts that center on various configurations of the Control Stick and C-buttons for optimal movement. Each mission has numerous objectives depending on the difficulty level, such as disabling classified enemy weaponry and seeking out undercover associates. A mission briefing (accessible through the pause menu) explains the order of objectives and targets for each mission and alerts Joanna of any obstacles, such as robotic sentry units or heavily armed bodyguards. Joanna has a diverse arsenal of weapons and gadgets. Her Falcon 2 sidearm is there for most missions and can later be equipped with a silencer or scope to make it more versatile. Other supernatural-themed weapons, like the Farsight XR-20, can see and fire through walls. Firearms all have vital secondary features accessible by holding the B button, for example, the grenade launcher of the SuperDragon assault rifle. Joanna's gadgets come into play for certain objectives, like utilizing Target Amplifiers to detonate targets remotely and the controllable CamSpy to stealthily photograph secret meetings. The story missions can be played solo or in two-player cooperative mode (or through a conniving Counter-op mode where the second player is a random enemy guard). Higher difficulties contain advanced enemy AI that will attempt to outwit Joanna in combat in addition to the extra objectives. Finishing the story missions unlocks some of the cheats to be used in either single-player or the deep multiplayer component known as the Combat Simulator.

A lot of the multiplayer modes, weapons, maps, and characters are initially locked away but are unlocked by progressing through the story or completing 30 separate Multiplayer Challenges that pit up to four players in different game setups against computer-controlled "simulants." The challenges help introduce play scenarios like standard deathmatch play (labeled Combat here) and other modes such as Hold the Briefcase, where players accrue points the longer they hold onto said briefcase before being taken out. A ridiculous amount of customization is available by adding up to eight simulants, player profiles with stat-tracking, and customizable game setups that can be saved for later use. The high-resolution visuals muscle everything it can out of the N64 and the Expansion Pak required to play the full game, with the intricate character, stage designs, and weapon reload animations standing out especially. The rich level of detail comes at a tolerable tradeoff with occasional dips in frame rate when faced with heavy opposition in solo missions or maxing out the simulant count when playing four-player Combat Simulator. The entirety of the dialogue for the narrative is impressively voiced, along with many amusing quips from guards. Grant Kirkhope and Graeme Norgate compose a timeless score that flawlessly complements this spy-thriller. This all culminates with a memorable save-the-galaxy campaign with superb production values and an equally impressive multiplayer component jam-packed with features, making it feel like two separate games that both deliver on all fronts.

Reflections: After the blockbuster success of *GoldenEye 007*, Rare banked on themselves with their own original IP, and *Perfect Dark* paid off huge, as it is a game that pushes the N64 to its limits. It is worth noting that, aside from training missions and two-player Combat Simulator support, the remaining vast majority of *Perfect Dark* requires the Expansion Pak. It is amazing to see how ahead of the time this was by having two-player co-op for the entire story, its innovative use of secondary weapon functions, and being one of the relatively few N64 games to support the Transfer Pak by connecting the Game Boy Color version (published by Rareware in 2000) for additional items and weapons. *Perfect Dark* was one of the constants in my rotation on N64 party nights back in its era, and when revisiting it for this review, I can safely assure you that this remains one of the best N64 multiplayer games. While Nintendo didn't officially publish this, they did assist Rare by being the distributor, which made this the first Mature-rated game Nintendo was involved with. After being acquired by Microsoft in 2002, Rare developed the prequel, *Perfect Dark Zero*, for the Xbox 360 launch in 2005, and later a 10th anniversary remaster of the N64 game in 2010 for Xbox Live Arcade. As of this writing, Microsoft recently announced a new Perfect Dark for their Xbox Series X and Series S consoles. – DK

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

PGA European Tour

PGA European Tour Golf (EU)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: June 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Infogrames Studios
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1-4
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Rare
☆☆

Drive, chip, and putt a path to golf glory in this faithful golf simulator! The action starts in a third-person view by selecting a club and aiming shots toward the desired target. Still, players must consider the altitude and wind before teeing off, or they will find themselves in one of the numerous hazards. Shot quality depends on a simple timing mechanic involving three presses of a single button: the first starts the shot meter, the second determines the shot's power, and the third determines accuracy. The shot meter is quite exacting, so be prepared for shots to soar off course with the slightest of errors. Putting requires only starting the meter and determining power and is much more forgiving (and enjoyable) than hitting long shots. There are four real-life courses (with lean histories of the course included for perusal) to play as a player-created character or a variety of PGA European Tour golfers, most of whom are familiar only to dedicated golf fans. Up to four players can golf with numerous rulesets, including stroke play, match play, two on two, and skins, as well as a single-player mode in which players can create a character and rise from amateur to scratch golfer to the top of the PGA European Tour. Created and real-life characters only vary aesthetically, as every character has the same drive distance, accuracy, and putting ability. The focus on simulation reinforces many of the "dull" stereotypes of the sport, with no music during play, an extremely sober English announcer, practice swings that have to be manually skipped, and a plodding pace of play. The graphics are a mixed bag, with realistic golfer animations accompanied by courses that are so poorly detailed that it can be difficult to tell the difference between rough, green, and fairway. This lack of graphical detail makes planning the journey to the cup significantly more challenging than it should be. While the developers brought a significant level of dedication to creating a realistic replica of the sport, this title is too boring, unfairly challenging, and visually uninspired to induce players to spend the significant amount of time necessary to master it.

Reflections: Between the odd marketing choice of releasing a golf game in North America lacking regional golfers, the poor visuals, and the generally tedious gameplay, it is of no surprise that *PGA European Tour* wasn't produced in large quantities and didn't sell particularly well. As a result, it's a relatively hard-to-find game for N64 collectors interested in obtaining a complete set. That's pretty much what this is known for nowadays, as there are more enjoyable golfing experiences among its peers, such as *Mario Golf* (N64), Hot Shots Golf series (PlayStation), or the Tiger Woods PGA Tour annual releases (PC, PlayStation). – JM

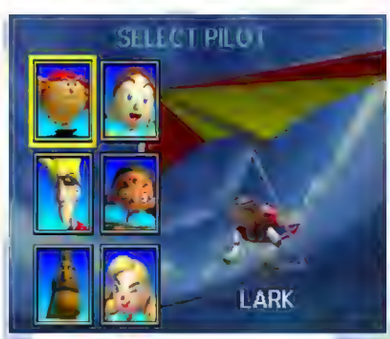
European Cartridge
PGA European Tour Golf

Pilotwings 64

Genre: Flight Simulator
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Paradigm Simulation, Nintendo EAD, Nintendo R&D3
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

It's time to take to the skies! In this 3D third-person aerial sports simulation, players take control of an assortment of flying vehicles with goals like hang-gliding through rings and popping balloons while strapped in a rocket belt. After selecting a vehicle and class, players are posed with challenges consisting of one or more tests, each with different objectives for a composite score. Each test is scored on various criteria, like time used, accuracy, and landing impact in the target spot to complete the test. Taking (and re-taking) tests allows players to earn medals. A bronze medal or better is required to unlock the next class for each vehicle while, medaling a silver badge or better for each non-beginner class unlocks extra games (Cannonball, Sky Diving, Jumble Hopper). Four islands (Holiday, Ever-Frost, Crescent, and Little States) provide unique vistas to explore and secrets to discover, while weather effects challenge the player to account for varying conditions. Six characters are available, each belonging to a weight class (heavy, medium, light) and with unique specializations that can complement the player's style. For example, heavier characters help reduce the influence of wind, while lighter characters are generally more maneuverable. This difference makes characters better/worse at certain events, like Goose, a medium-weight pilot, excelling at sky diving but struggling somewhat in gyrocopter. Even though no one has a distinct advantage over another, it's still good to play to their strengths. Infinite retries allow players to master individual sections before moving on, which helps soften the intensity of the otherwise surprisingly steep difficulty curve. Vehicles add features that provide welcome variety over time, such as taking photos from the hang glider or launching missiles at targets from the gyrocopter. The photo system allows players to take snapshots and save their favorite ones to the Game Pak. If the "standard" modes of flight are not enough, the bonus "Birdman" suit can be earned for sightseeing around the different scenic locales. There are also secrets to discover during the flying journey. Besides acclimating to oddly subjective scoring criteria, this simulation soars high, giving an excellent view of what made the Nintendo 64 so exciting when it first arrived.

Reflections: Like its predecessor, *Pilotwings* for the SNES, this sequel was a well-executed launch title for its console that people often overlook in favor of the Mario game it released alongside. This time, instead of showing off Mode 7, the highlights are Silicon Graphics-powered islands with terrain packed with secrets to discover and extra visual touches like sailing boats and other moving attractions. The Flight Club of Tony, Shirley, Lance, and Big Al from the first game has been replaced by aviators that feel more like hobby enthusiasts than professionals (which is a small letdown). I still can't shake the feeling Lark is *Nintendo Power*'s Nester, given the striking resemblance (and a nod in the September 1996 issue). – DG



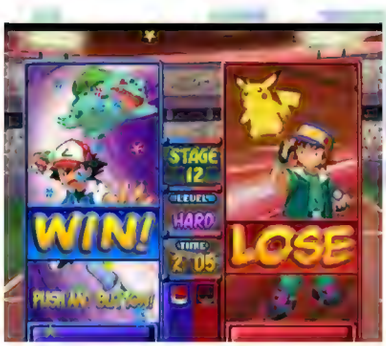
European Cartridge

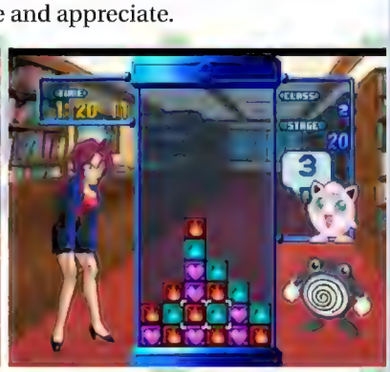
Japanese Cartridge

Pokémon Puzzle League

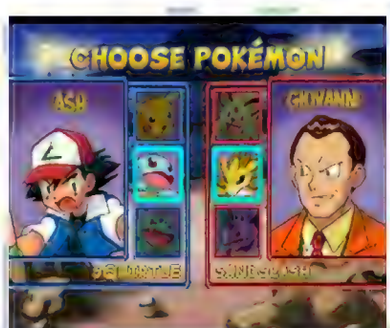
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Sept. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Intelligent Systems, Nintendo Software Technology
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

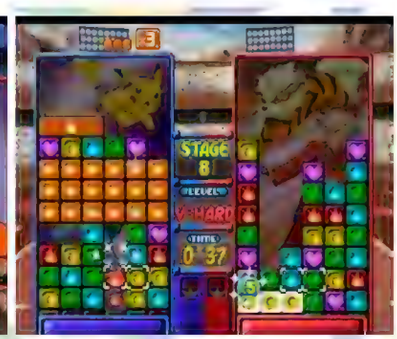
Fans of the *Pokémon* anime, stand by for some puzzling action! In the Pokémon Puzzle League Village, Ash Ketchum takes on many familiar opponents, including members of Team Rocket, through several modes at different locations that all share the same core gameplay mechanic. Given a 2D playfield of colored blocks, Ash can swap the position of any horizontally adjacent two. Positioning three or more consecutive horizontal or vertical colored blocks makes them disappear, and any blocks above drop down. The primary Stadium story mode involves one-on-one combat against a gauntlet of foes. Each side has a board of randomized blocks; a new row pushes up from the bottom over time. To help them survive the longest, each player must produce combos (clearing more than the minimum three blocks) and chains (creating a series of matches) to send garbage blocks to their opponent's side. Transforming these long garbage blocks into usable colored squares occurs by making an adjacent match. If a block reaches the top of the tank, it is game over (with unlimited continues). While the speed starts slow and the opponents easy, the action ramps up to become a captivating balance between setting up combos and managing garbage blocks at the top. There are four difficulty settings for selecting the level of challenge and even a hidden fifth difficulty for the ultimate test. Other modes have different goals that keep the simple mechanic interesting. Puzzle University presents a series of specifically arranged blocks that Ash has a limited number of moves to completely clear. Spa Service is a line-clearing challenge where Ash must remove blocks down to a certain level as more push up from below, except the tank is wrapped around a 3D cylinder that he must rotate to attend to blocks not visible. With all the ways to play, including challenging a second player, there is a lot to enjoy, whether sitting thoughtfully for minutes creating a puzzle for others or tapping furiously at the D-pad, making combos before the blocks pile to the top. It is an entertaining adventure wrapped in an adorable and colorful cartoon bow with sound clips and characters that viewers of the anime will love and appreciate.





Reflections: I'll admit that when I first played *Pokémon Puzzle League*, I thought it was a less entertaining reskin of *Tetris Attack* (which itself is a reskin of the Super Famicom game *Panel de Pon*). Many hours later, it proved my initial feelings wrong! There is a surprising amount of satisfaction available for all types of puzzle game fans. Do you like it slow and strategic? They've got you covered! What about so fast-paced you'll need to warm up to get into the zone? Yep, that too! And it doesn't hurt that it's all presented in a bright, cute animation style. Casual and serious fans of the franchise alike can derive satisfaction from Pikachu emphatically screaming his name in recognition of your excellent 10x chain. – KY





European Cartridge

Pokémon Snap

Pokémon Snap: Pocket Monsters' Snap (JP)
Genre: Rail Shooter
Release Date: July 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆

Professor Oak wants to explore Pokémon Island, so he needs someone to work their way through the environments, capturing the creatures on film up to a photo of the rare Mew! The player begins with the Beach map's grassy hills and sandy shore but can unlock six more up to the psychedelic outer space of Rainbow Cloud. After selecting a course, the player takes a seat in the ZERO-ONE vehicle as it begins automatically moving. In rail-shooter motion and 3D first-person views, the player can freely look around, observing the scenery and the many Pokémon that appear in bright, colorful, and accurate depictions of the cartoon creatures. The Z trigger enables camera mode for snapping the best pictures, keeping in mind a Pokémon's size in the frame and pose, such as getting a close-up of an Electrode exploding. Controls are smooth and intuitive, so there is no excuse for being too slow to snap a picture. The player has 60 shots available on each course, which run about two and a half real-time minutes. At the end of the course, the player chooses the best picture in their film for each Pokémon, which they present to Professor Oak for scoring. He loves excellent photography, so if there are issues, he offers tips to improve. For example, Pokémon do not like being photographed from behind, so those shots consistently score low. High-scoring images are necessary, as attaining overall score thresholds, capturing a certain number of Pokémon, and finding alternate routes are ways to unlock new maps. At times, the professor offers items and tools to help interact with the Pokémon, including a Pester Ball, which has effects like spooking them out of hiding. Courses can be played repeatedly, and they need to be, especially after acquiring new items. Items used in one area can affect what and how Pokémon appear later, so keeping that lens on new actions can result in changes like an evolving Pokémon or interactions between two of them. After capturing Mew on film, the final task is complete, but players can replay courses for higher scores or a more comprehensive Report. Only 63 of the 151 original generation Pokémon are present, but that does not diminish the fun. Adults and children alike can get a kick out of interacting with the Pokémon and seeing what excitement ensues in this casual diversion for fans of this beloved series or those seeking a pleasant photographic safari.

Reflections: *Pokémon Snap* hits all the right buttons for me. It's cute and lowkey with a hint of completionism. I admit I was a little upset when the fantastic photo I took of Magmar spitting fire on a Charmander got a low score because the frame was centered on the fire and not on either of the creatures. I suppose this is why you have a separate album to save these masterpieces. When this was initially released, you could take your cartridge to a participating store (Blockbuster Video in the U.S.) and print stickers of the four photos saved in your Gallery via the Pokémon Snap Station kiosk. I never did this, but if I had, I would have been one of those kids who would have stashed the sticker sheet away and not used a single one. – KY

European Cartridge

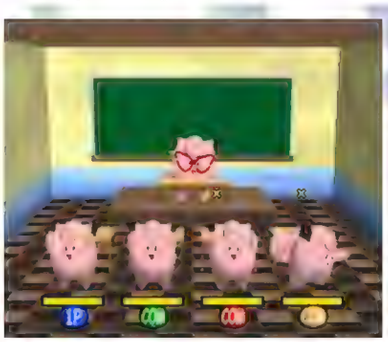
Japanese Cartridge

Pokémon Stadium

Pocket Monsters' Stadium 2 (JP)
Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Dev.: HAL Laboratory, Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Transfer Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Become the best, like no one ever was, by battling with all 151 first-generation Pokémon against computer trainers or friends in this exciting but somewhat simple battle bonanza. The primary objective is to pit a team of six selectable Pokémon, gorgeously rendered using media-accurate models, against opponents in three-versus-three turn-based battles. These occur based on each monster's speed (two to four human players can also play in tag-team battles with a total of 12 Pokémon) and take place from a fixed-camera third-person perspective. A monster's moves are selected using an easy-to-understand menu via the R button. The player's team, which might include the electrifying Pikachu, ferocious Charizard, or high-flying Dragonite (to name a few), can be selected through a pre-battle rental service or brought over from the *Pokémon Red*, *Blue*, or *Yellow* Game Boy titles by using the optional Transfer Pak. While renting Pokémon is convenient, transfers feel more satisfying – the transferred monsters bring over their attributes, while the rental Pokémon are entirely predetermined, offering less player agency. Each Pokémon falls into one or two of fifteen elemental types, including water, rock, and ghost. In battle, each can attack its opponent to deplete its health points or buff its statistics (usually attack, defense, or speed) using one of four moves based on the same types. Attacks deal double or half damage against Pokémon from their complementary elemental types. While having an elementally superior Pokémon does not guarantee victory (a monster's level on a scale of 100 is also vital), it is enough of a boon to ensure that battles between similarly leveled Pokémon are utterly predictable. Battles are accessible through four game modes. Solo players can tackle the four eight-round tournaments in the Stadium or take on the Kanto Region's 13 best trainers in the Gym Leader Castle. Two players can compete in regular battles using Battle Now!, while up to four can compete in regular or tag-team matches in Free Battle. There is also a Kid's Club mode featuring nine mini-games, such as a treadmill race and follow-the-leader, but it is a momentary distraction at best. While the visual appeal of battling with and against Pokémon in a fully three-dimensional space is enticing, the lack of strategic depth in the battles and game modes ensures slight lulls in an ultimately enjoyable experience.

Reflections: A main draw of *Pokémon Stadium* is its visuals, as the variety of colorful models and animations allows for plenty of cheer-worthy moments and player experimentation if only to see each critter pull off their best moves. While the sameness of the battle-based game modes is a small detriment to the overall experience, I am always enthralled enough by watching my Blastoise waste everything in its path to savor each fight and look forward to the next bout, especially against friends. – CP

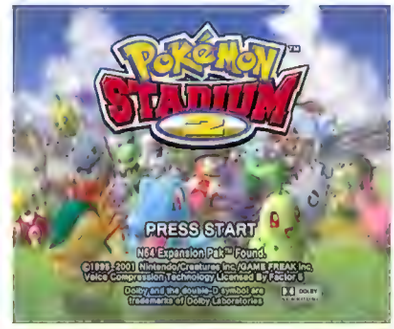


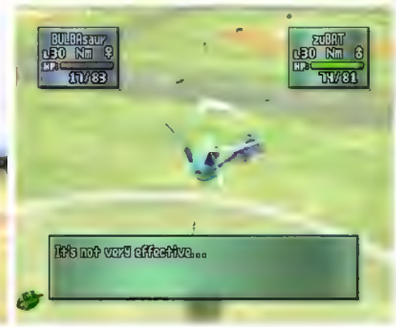
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Pocket Monsters' Stadium 2

Pokémon Stadium 2

Pocket Monsters' Stadium Gold and Silver (JP)
Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Mar. 2001
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Dev.: HAL Laboratory, Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Transfer Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆





Battle with all 251 first- and second-generation Pokémon against computer players or friends to become the greatest trainer in White City! Select a team of six Pokémon to combat an opponent trainer's team in three-versus-three turn-based battles based on each Pokémon's speed statistic (or partner with an ally to battle two opponents in tag-team battles). The returning and new monsters are wonderfully rendered and animated in fixed-camera, 3D bouts, showcasing a wide variety of melee/projectile attacks and hit reactions. Battle choices are made using an easy-to-understand menu system. Every Pokémon and its moves can be categorized into one or two of seventeen elements, like fire, dark, and steel. Each Pokémon can use one of four moves to attack its opponent to deplete its health points or sap its statistics (usually attack, defense, or speed). They can also buff their statistics – attacks deal double or half damage against Pokémon from complementary elemental types. Pokémon with a stronger elemental type have a clear advantage, but a monster's level (from one to 100) can also help to secure its victory. The player's team may include original favorites such as Meowth, Jigglypuff, and Koffing or newcomers like Totodile, Skarmory, or Smeargle. They can be rented before each battle or transferred from the first- and second-generation Pokémon Game Boy and Game Boy Color titles (*Red*, *Blue*, *Yellow*, *Gold*, *Silver*, *Crystal*) via the Transfer Pak. Transferred Pokémon are usually the superior choice due to their experience and player-focused move sets, making the rental monsters feel monotonous by comparison. The eternal battle takes place across five game modes. Solo players can fight through four eight-round tournaments in White City's Stadium or take on both Johto and Kanto's best trainers in the Gym Leader Tower. Two players can compete in regular battles using a team of six randomly selected Pokémon in Battle Now! or by using only transferred monsters in Event Battle. Up to four trainers can compete in regular or tag-team battles in Free Battle. Players can also participate in twelve new mini-games, such as button matching or tennis, or test their battle knowledge by taking quizzes in the Pokémon Academy. All game modes are ultimately satisfying, if not somewhat repetitive, cementing this as another fine way to battle for virtual-monster-fighting glory.

Reflections: *Pokémon Stadium 2* is a textbook example of the philosophy of "if it's not broken, don't fix it," to the point that it is often difficult not to think of it as a mere expansion of *Pokémon Stadium*. The addition of the 100 second-generation monsters certainly adds some new variety to the battles, but ultimately, this feels largely the same as its predecessor. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing, as the first entry, much like this one, was razor-focused in its intent. While more fresh content would have been welcome, the content present is as addictive as ever, and in the end, it fulfills its purpose as an avenue for trainers to duke it out with the fullest roster possible. – CP

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Pocket Monsters' Stadium Gold and Silver

Pokémon Stadium: Pocket Monsters' Stadium

Genre: Strategy
Release Date: Aug. 1998
Region: JP
Dev.: HAL Laboratory, Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Transfer Pak
Japanese Required: Moderate
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Square off against a friend or computer trainer to win pokémon battles in this visually appealing but content shallow monster battling simulator. There are two game modes from which to choose – Free Battle allows players to jump straight into a single fight, while Tournament takes place across eight battles. Both game types start with choosing a team of six well-rendered and smoothly-animated monsters to go against opponents in three-versus-three turn-based battles. Fights take place from a third-person perspective and play out in the order of each fighter's speed. A team can be selected from 40 of the 151 first-generation Pokémon and might include one of the final evolution starters, the trio of legendary birds, or the ever-present series mascot Pikachu. Pokémon can be chosen through a pre-battle rental service or imported from the *Pocket Monsters Red*, *Blue*, or *Yellow* Game Boy titles by inserting them into a controller via the Transfer Pak. Rental Pokémon can be chosen freely or picked from eight premade templates based on elemental matchups in Free Battle mode. While rentals are the quicker option, transferred Pokémon have a definite edge due to their player-determined move sets. Every pokémon falls into one or two of fifteen elemental types, including fire, grass, and psychic. In battle, a pokémon can attack its opponent to deplete its health points or buff its own statistics (usually attack, defense, or speed) using one of four moves based around the same types – Blastoise may attack with its devastating Hydro Pump, while Golem can choose to buff its defense with Harden. Attacks deal double or half damage against pokémon from their complementary elemental types. Though elementally superior pokémon have a definite advantage, the monster's level (from one to 100) can also help to secure a win. While the battles are nice to look at, the experience is ultimately shallow due to a lack of variety. Almost 70 percent of the first-generation pokémon, including series staples such as Meowth and Jigglypuff, are absent, and the inclusion of only two game modes makes for a barebones experience. While the battles are fun to experience for the first time, there is ultimately little staying power.

Reflections: While it is important to judge individual games on their own merits, it is nearly impossible not to consider *Pokémon Stadium: Pocket Monsters Stadium* as a prototype of its successor, *Pokémon Stadium* (*Pocket Monsters Stadium 2* in Japan), considering that almost every asset from it was directly carried over. This was originally intended to be expanded upon through the Nintendo 64 Disk Drive. However, when the 64DD failed to catch on, the project was instead realized as the aforementioned sequel, leaving this entry as little more than a curiosity for hardcore fans. It is also a reminder for developers never to put all of their eggs in one basket, especially when that basket is an incredibly expensive add-on. – CP

Polaris SnoCross

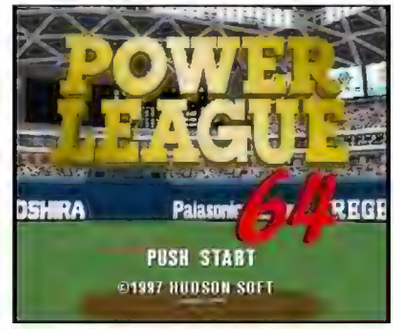
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Vicarious Visions, The Golden Gate Game Company
Publisher: Vatical Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

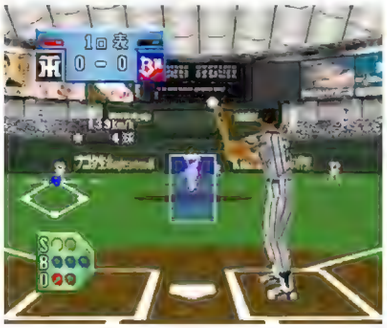
Put on those colorful reflective lens goggles and hit the snow in this highly addictive Polaris licensed snowmobile racer. There are three camera angles to choose from while racing; two are behind the rider (near and far), and one is on the front of the snowmobile. Players have three modes to choose from – Single Event, Tournament, or Instant Action, the latter of which randomly selects race options (track, time of day, weather, and snowmobile) and hurries the player to the track. Tournament and Instant Action modes are single-player only. However, up to four players can race via split-screen in Single Event mode. There are three tracks and five snowmobiles to choose from. Playing through Tournament mode unlocks an additional seven tracks and thirteen more snowmobiles. During races, four riders compete for the checkered flag while weaving through obstacles, leaning into tight turns, and catching large amounts of air off hills and ramps. Finding the many hidden paths throughout each course is a rewarding experience and is practically a requirement if players wish to finish first in the final races. Completing races rewards the player with wrenches used to upgrade their snowmobile's speed, acceleration, handling, and stability. Players can also fill up a wrench meter by pulling off stunts with certain button combinations in the air. Attempting a stunt can be quite risky. If the player cannot complete the button combination before hitting the ground, they will be thrown off their snowmobile. The gameplay is addicting due to the upgrade system and unlockables, but the visuals and audio are less than stellar. Textures are low in detail, and an abundance of clipping can be seen between snowmobiles and the environment. The dull rock music that plays on a loop is quickly forgettable. On the flip side, the lighting effects during night races are a visual treat. Despite its shortcomings, race fans can enjoy some fun on the snowy slopes.

Reflections: I'm not the best at racing games, but that doesn't mean I don't love to play them. *Polaris SnoCross* is one that I've grown attached to throughout the years. It's quite forgiving, especially for gamers like me, who sometimes crash often. Hitting turns too hard and veering off course is a favorite pastime of mine. Thankfully, going off course can be rewarding since many hidden paths exist. A quick tip: pulling off the "No Hander" trick (R button + UP) is the easiest stunt to complete. It's fast and rarely results in a crash. – MV

Power League 64

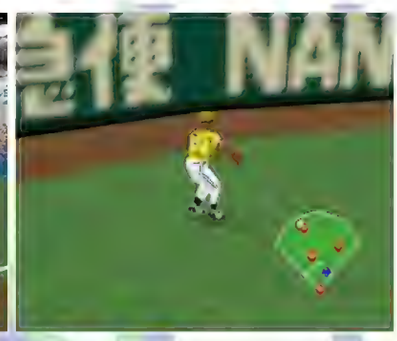
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆





Play as official teams licensed by Nippon Professional Baseball in this sports simulation. Pitching and batting are operated from a behind-the-catcher perspective, while a rotating overhead camera handles fielding. After choosing a team and stadium, adjust the batting order and starting pitcher, if desired, and prepare to play. Batting is a cumbersome endeavor where making contact with the ball means precisely timing when to move the cursor in line with where the ball will cross home plate. Even after multiple games, this never feels natural, and batting ultimately proves to be a dreadful experience. Fielding is also problematic. The 3D camera cuts away unpredictably to a fielder after the ball is hit into play, forcing blind fielder movement across the field to anticipate the ball's path. This detriment is a catalyst for unintentionally moving players away from the ball, resulting in frequent botched fielding attempts, even with basic ground balls. Pitching is relatively painless by comparison. After choosing to throw a fastball or curveball, guide the ball over the plate with the Control Stick. A strike zone box appears after each pitch to indicate where the ball landed. There are four primary modes of play: Watch mode sets two computer-controlled teams against each other while sitting back and observing, and Open mode enables a quick game against the computer or one other player. Pennant initiates a 10- or full 135-game season. In HR Race, a pitcher automatically throws slow pitches across the plate, and the goal is to see how many home runs a batter can deliver before three failed attempts. Player models are animated nicely, and the massive stadiums and domes are impressive to behold. Unfortunately, that is all overshadowed by a complete absence of facial detail on player models, which is especially unsettling when a new batter approaches the plate. This rendition of baseball will win no championships, as it is tarnished from a flurry of mechanical problems and is ultimately too frustrating to enjoy.

Reflections: About a dozen Power League titles were released between the late 1980s and 1990s, but only the original was released outside of Japan in 1989 as *World Class Baseball* on the TurboGrafx-16. There are a couple of attractive gameplay options in *Power League 64* I rarely see in baseball games, like the ability to have a "mercy" rule if the score becomes too one-sided and the ability to toggle fielding errors on or off. Those features were fun to play around with, though they were not enough to make up for nearly everything else being disappointing. One main takeaway was having a short piece of music stuck in my head for hours after playing. There is this brief, upbeat jingle that repeatedly plays throughout the games. It's infectious and will forever be imprinted in my mind after experiencing the otherwise unpleasant *Power League 64*. – DK

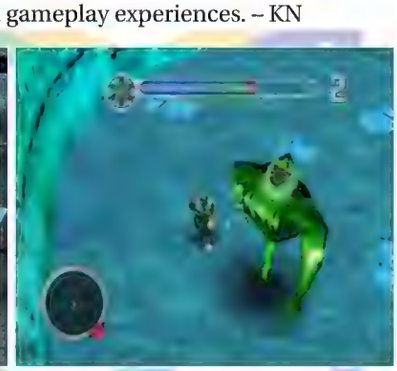


(Saban's) Power Rangers: Lightspeed Rescue

Genre: Action
Release Date: Sept. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Mass Media
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

The Power Rangers from the television show must protect Mariner Bay from the demonic Diabolico in this action title featuring generic fighting and driving sequences bridged by comic book cutscenes. The menu has a story mode, an arcade mode, and several difficulty options. Story episodes have several levels to run through, almost 30 in total, and players may start from any previously completed levels in their save file. In Ranger Rescue missions, one pre-selected Ranger must complete objectives like locating items or rescuing hostages in a city, subway, caves, etc. Most of the time is spent running around in a top-down view aided by a radar compass that points to nearby targets. The Rangers have blaster guns on the show, but here, they can fire shots from their fists and backward with their feet. Portals will relentlessly spawn goons in spandex costumes until destroyed. Enemies lack variety and challenge, as there are only a few types, and most simply run straight into the player. Diabolico's latest monsters await at the end in some rescue stages, like Typhonus, Lavaca, Trembler, or others. Still, these barely qualify as boss fights due to their being so short and simple. The Rangers' Zords are included and look accurate: a fire truck, jet, ambulance, water tanker, and hazmat truck. They feature in certain stages where players drive down a street from a 3D top-down fixed angle, shoot enemies, avoid traffic, and rescue citizens in need. Only jet sequences handle differently, allowing players to hover around a 3D level, collecting items or people. Fitting the Power Rangers tradition, the monsters eventually become titanic, and the Zords combine into the giant Megazord robot to fight in a cityscape arena. This mode is in a first-person view until close to the enemy when the camera switches to third-person. Zords can shoot missiles and punch, but players must be cautious, as enemies can steal power-ups. The Megazord Arena mode is the same but available in a two-player split-screen. Unfortunately, every mode feels boring, having repetitive sound and gameplay plus lazy animations and artwork, with only a few supporting characters like Captain Mitchell. The action is not too frustrating and may entertain children, but they deserve better.

Reflections: Like most '90s kids, I eagerly watched the first *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* series. I wasn't a huge fan, but I enjoyed it more than I liked to admit. The Green Ranger's arc was especially compelling for a kids' show. Subsequent seasons didn't interest me. However, in recent years I have watched Linkara recap all the seasons in his "The History of Power Rangers" video series online (hence my awareness of how poorly the game represents the show). *Lightspeed Rescue* had other releases on the PlayStation, Game Boy Color, and computer platforms. Each was from a different developer and thus had decidedly different gameplay experiences. – KN



European Cartridge

The Powerpuff Girls: Chemical X-Traction

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 2001
Region: NA
Developer: Asylum Entertainment, VIS Entertainment
Publisher: BAM! Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Password Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆

The city of Townsville needs help! The Powerpuff Girls baked a pie, but the nefarious Mojo Jojo stole it. It is time for the three young heroines to spring into action. In Story Mode, choose from Blossom, Bubbles, or Buttercup, each of whom plays nearly identically, and take on a handful of familiar baddies from the cartoon show of the same name. Punch, kick, and chuck furniture and objects in a string of third-person one-on-one battles set in various 3D claustrophobic arenas. Collect enough beakers of Chemical-X from around the stage to earn an explosive, powered-up attack, which is short-lived but effective. The wonky camera and poorly designed 3D levels make for an experience that is messy and difficult to control. The actual combat demands little skill, only requiring mindlessly spamming attack buttons. Playable characters also move much slower than the computer-controlled opponents, which is endlessly frustrating. Battles are fought across a sampling of well-known locales from the TV series, including Pokey Oaks Kindergarten and Townsville City Hall, where members of the Powerpuff Rogue's Gallery – like Sedusa, Fuzzy Lumpkins, and Princess Morbucks – wait their turn to face the trio. Once every foe has been bested by each Powerpuff Girl, the climactic battle opens with everybody's favorite androgynous devil, HIM. Victory earns a glorious, one-screen ending, the only prize for completing this misadventure. If the single-player Story Mode is not satisfying enough, take out any frustrations on a buddy in an old-fashioned one-on-one brawl in Simulation Mode, where unlocked characters from Story Mode can be played. A grating rendition of the animated show's theme song is the only music featured throughout, and the blocky, polygonal 3D versions of these beloved characters have little personality. The whole experience feels like a power-puffed punch to the face of the cartoon that inspired it.

Reflections: *The Powerpuff Girls* is a great cartoon because it centers around three young superheroines, each with their own unique strengths and personalities: Bubbles is good-natured and creative, Blossom is the hard-working leader, and Buttercup is the fiery warrior who never backs down from a challenge. This 64-bit rendition offers none of that character or color. The developers "X-tracted" all the vibrancy, action, and fun from the Powerpuff Girls and created something flat and generic instead. Frankly, the only thing these protagonists have in common with the heroines is big heads. To think that someone thought this was an acceptable representation of our beloved crime-fighting kindergartners! – DM

Premier Manager 64: Total Football Management

Genre: Sports, Simulation
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: PAL
Developer: Dinamic Multimedia
Publisher: Gremlin Interactive
Players: 1-4
Features: Controller Pak Save, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

This spreadsheet-style soccer management simulation lets players choose any English team and turn them into champions by customizing key details of their professional lives. Up to four players can work on team profiles in Manager mode: buy new players, dish out training regimens, upgrade the stadium, and check in on finances. There isn't much else in the way of options, though, as the player can't manage stadium costs aside from match-day tickets. Matches automatically play out as data charts, including possession, injuries, and bookings. When finished, there is an option to watch match highlights in 3D, featuring commentary from Barry Davies and player motion capture by England legend Alan Shearer. Individual players have stars to denote their skill level, which can remain static or decay as players age. These stars add up to improve the team's overall rating, but there aren't any individual stats such as heading, tackling, or shooting. All real team and player rosters from the Premier League through Division 3 are present to choose from, as well as 28 European teams. Career mode challenges the player to manage a Division 3 team from being relegated out of the league. Top-tier teams compete in the usual league and Cup matches, along with a European cup. The controls support using either the Control Stick or the D-pad, though the former is not as precise as the latter and often results in overshooting the desired selection. The main tactics screen shows the team reversed in the formation window, so assigning a player to the right will place him on the left. This screen lacks depth outside of changing formations and choosing a generic play style, as there is no option to assign players to an individual task. Menus are functional yet hideously garish in color. Non-stop EDM house music plays in the background, which can, mercifully, be switched off. It is a simple, fun footy manager with some merits that get dragged down by its poor presentation and lack of depth.

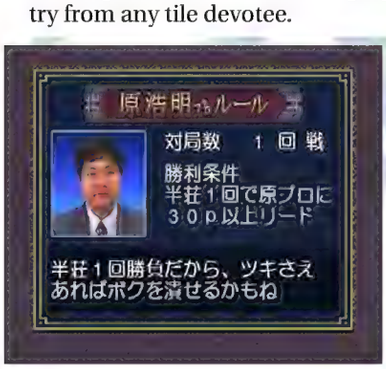
Reflections: Seeing some of the familiar names on rosters after 20 years was the most fun I got out *Premier Manager 64*. I was immediately put off by the menu presentation, which looked like a 12-year-old kid knocked it out on PowerPoint. If I couldn't switch off the abhorrent music, I might have gone insane. Despite the childish user interface and extreme simplicity, there's an okay experience to be had here. I like being able to choose sponsors and upgrades to the stadium, but that's about as deep as the sim gets. Compared to other entries in the series, Premier Manager 64 feels like a feature-light trudge through a worksheet with no hook to keep me suckered in. – JE

Pro Mahjong Kiwame 64

[Pro Mahjong Extreme 64]
Genre: Tile Game
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Developer: Athena
Publisher: Athena
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆

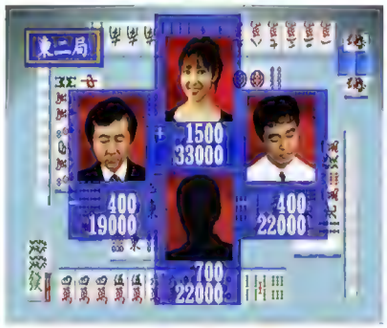
Enthusiasts looking to play (and defeat) some of the biggest names in riichi mahjong can face off against 16 real-life professionals (such as Takeo Kojima, Junko Takahashi, and Masahito Ida) and throw down on the ubiquitous green felt table in this serious take on the tile game. Mahjong is a four-player gambling game of creating the best 14-tile hand out of 144 tiles split into three numbered suits and two sets of honor suits. Players start with 13 tiles and take turns drawing and discarding them until someone reveals a winning hand. Hands are worth different points based on factors such as what specific tiles were used and whether or not a tile from an opponent's discard pile was claimed in the process. For this electronic experience, there are three modes of play: Gamble, Professional, and Training. The first two modes offer similar experiences with two degrees of difficulty. Within each is the more casual Free Game, which involves a single full round of mahjong, and Challenge, which presents specific criteria to meet, such as winning a set of matches by a particular number of points. Professional also offers a long-form tournament mode to be crowned the national champion. Training offers several different tools to improve mahjong skills. This includes an analysis of playstyle based on sample games and a quiz on various aspects of mahjong, such as what tiles are necessary to complete a winning hand or how much a hand is worth. The graphics have a simple, clean aesthetic with photo-realistic images of each mahjong professional, including different facial expressions based on how well the round went for them. Unfortunately, the bland table looks incomplete without the other players' hands being visible, showing what open sets – created by claiming an opponent's discard – they have previously called. While a seemingly minor detail, knowing what tiles are out of play affects what sets a player is willing to gamble on completing, and it is an unnecessary inconvenience to have to press an additional button to see them. The music is good but without variety, which is strongly evident after two players call riichi, and the tune briefly becomes more intense. While any semblance of a story mode is absent, this offering is still a solid, challenging mahjong experience worthy of a try from any tile devotee.

Reflections: At first glance, *Pro Mahjong Kiwame 64* looks like a boring mahjong game, but after some time, I realized I enjoyed the no-nonsense aura. It doesn't have to be bad that there's no emotional, dramatic story to follow as your character fights the pain away at the table. I don't need my face over the blue dragon avatar that reads "PLAYER" when I have imaginary, electronic points from Japanese mahjong greats of the past. Some of those pros are still active today and even went on to be involved in other mahjong titles, such as *Takahashi Junko no Mahjong Seminar* for the Xbox. – KY



Pro Mahjong Tsuwamono 64: Jansō Battle ni Chōsen

[Pro Mahjong Soldier 64: Challenge the Parlor]
Genre: Tile Game
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Regions: JP
Developer: Culture Brain
Publisher: Culture Brain
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

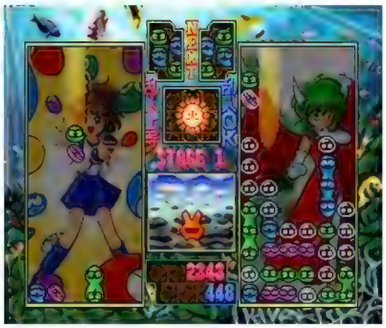


Do battle with some of mahjong's biggest names in this straightforward single-player title. The gameplay is traditional four-player riichi mahjong, where players attempt to form a scoring hand by exchanging tiles in a static top-down view of the playing surface. Players start by entering a name and gender for a record that keeps track of progress. Sixteen real-world mahjong players are featured to compete against, with an all-star roster including the likes of Yudai Maehara, Shimizu Kaori, Takeo Kojima, Yoko Watanabe, and more. Parlor Battle mode is a six-venue gauntlet, requiring players to win the most points over a series of matches at different mahjong parlors. Tournament mode features three unique tournaments, each with its own ruleset (round-robin, 8-player tournament, and 16-player tournament with dual advance). Free mode is a quick pick-up game for shorter sessions, with a wide variety of configurable settings. The tutorial mode offers one beginner and two intermediate instructors that the player can query for advice, such as which tile to discard, but otherwise, plays normally. Stat tracking, available from the main menu, shows both win/loss rates and success rates for various actions, helping players get a detailed picture of how effective their playstyle is. Settings include a handful of tile colors, managing Controller Pak data, and a surprisingly wide selection of musical styles to choose from – reggae, bossa nova, classical, and jazz, among them. Sadly, the synthesized soundtrack is sub-standard, as is the visual presentation. Opponents smile or frown based on results, and large, colorful calls stand out, but the interface, graphics, and sound make for a weak hand overall.

Reflections: With its stars featured on the box art, *Pro Mahjong Tsuwamono 64: Jansō Battle ni Chōsen* leans into highlighting the elevated level of play its roster offers. These 16 men and women are no lightweights – most are established professionals with decades of experience swapping tiles. Andō Mitsuru had his own game on PS1 (*Mahjong Senjutsu: Andō Mitsuru Pro no Akūkan Satsuhō*) a few years earlier. Yoko Watanabe was an up-and-coming pro player at the time and has had a successful career since – her Team Fairy won the 2019 Evening Fuji Cup. Even the late Takeo Kojima, known as "Mister Mahjong," appears. He was an influential figure from his familiarity with Tetsuya Asada (the gambler and novelist behind a series of famous mahjong stories) in the 1970s. He founded the Japan Professional Mahjong League in the 1980s. – DG

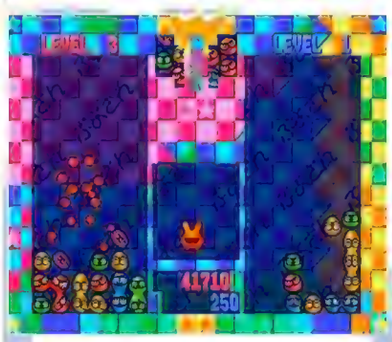
Puyo Puyo Sun 64

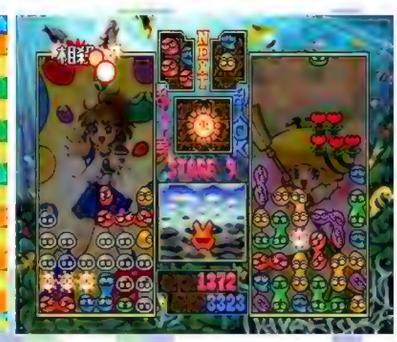
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Compile
Publisher: Compile
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

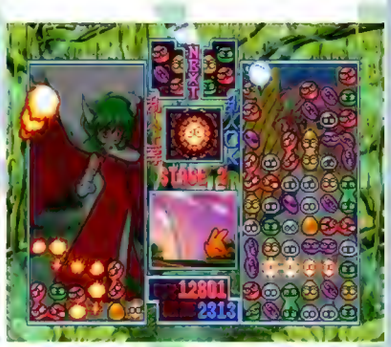


In an attempt to get a tan and a lot of female attention, Satan uses his magic to enlarge the sun, thus putting the world at risk. The only way to end his plot is by puzzling through opponents in Puyo battles. These consist of stacking and clearing Puyo (circular slime creatures) in playfield tanks, causing garbage Puyo to travel to the enemy's side, and ultimately building progressively more impressive combos to fill the enemy's tank before they do the same to the hero. Puyo come in multiple colors and drop from the top of the screen in clumps of two. Players can move and rotate the pieces and drop them where they wish. Connecting four or more same-colored Puyo clears the Puyo and sends garbage Puyo to the opponent's tank, which can be removed by clearing the ones touching them. Players accomplish the goal of filling the opponent's tank by creating combo chains that trickle down when cleared, made stronger when removing Puyo that touch the newly introduced Sun Puyo that randomly drop during gameplay. The main story comes in three flavors: easy, normal, and hard. The easy option follows the immature demon Draco Centauros through three opponents as she uses the enlarged sun to get a tan of her own. The normal difficulty tasks Arle Nadja with confronting Satan and setting the world right. The hard difficulty involves Schezo Wegey completing the back half of Arle's challenge but with tougher AI. While the visuals are lively and exude silly, happy fun, the AI opponents quickly wallop players who have yet to invest significant time learning advanced strategies. Though a puzzle game, the key to success is approaching each match with tactics, quick one- or two-chain combos to apply pressure, and utilizing larger Puyo clears to utterly scuttle any hope opponents have of turning things around. Character interactions are bubbly and charming, but things quickly get nasty when the AI drops garbage Puyo in the exact spot a player needs to complete a combo. The tutorial mode helps, but the most fun comes from going head-to-head with a second player or testing things in a tournament bracket. Stacking Puyo is addictingly bright and fun (even when losing), making it a must-play for puzzle enthusiasts.

Reflections: The pun in the title comes from this being the third in the Puyo Puyo series. The Japanese word for three is *san*, which sounds like "sun." Three was indeed a lucky number, as the original arcade version was ranked one of the most successful titles that year by the Japanese magazine *Game Machine*. It received other ports to the Sega Saturn, PlayStation, PC, and Game Boy Color. This iteration of the Puyo formula would be a game-changer for the series, perpetuating the concept of character-specific voiced lines and animations for different combo chains. There's something so charming about puzzle-fighting against an evil elephant king as a cute anime girl, but also so aggravating about a fish man utterly wrecking the perfect Puyo stack and laughing as he does. Puyo is an addictive substance, so imbibe it wisely. – CPr

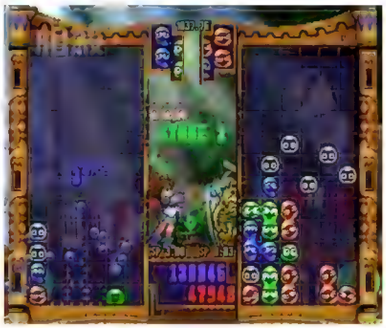


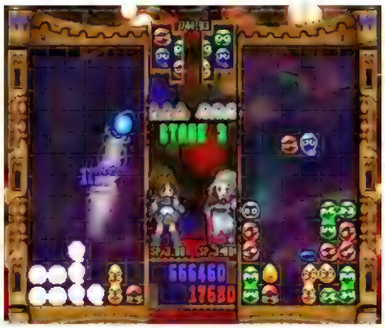




Puyo Puyo~n Party

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Compile
Publisher: Compile
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆



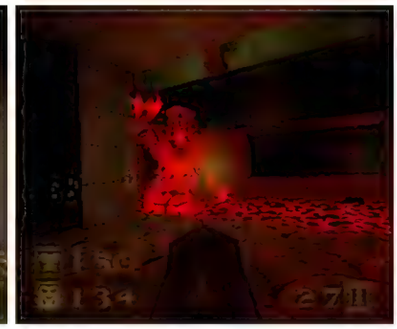


Trouble is afoot at the Puyo Puyo Circus! Arle arrives to watch the fun with her cute partner, Carbuncle, only to have him mysteriously vanish. Now it's up to Arle to use Puyo to save her friend via the adorable stacking puzzle mechanics. Colorful, bubble-like Puyo drop in the tank in connecting sets of two. The player is tasked to rotate, move, and drop them in connecting groups of four or more of a matching color. Doing so will clear those Puyo and send clear (garbage) Puyo to opponents. Clever stacking allows for chaining combos as Puyo clear, with larger chains sending more garbage Puyo until one side's screen fills. New to each character are consumable super attacks that affect play in different ways, such as Arle blocking all garbage Puyo falling for 15 seconds or Suketōdara (the fish-man) changing all colors of the most plentiful Puyo to the second most plentiful Puyo. These special attacks add a fun, chaotic element to battles but can feel broken as they favor some characters, such as Archan's super popping 12 random Puyo at a time. The story modes can send Arle against three opponents for quick play or 16 to finish the full story. Unique rules get added throughout the story, such as starting with garbage Puyo at the beginning of a match or Puyo falling slower than normal. Up to four players can get into the cute action in a head-to-head mode that sadly strips out the characters for straightforward Puyo battling. The standout multiplayer attraction is Bomb Puyo, which acts like a hot potato as players clear Puyo to pass a lit bomb back and forth. All modes work with a single player and CPU opponents. There is also an Endless Nazo Puyo mode where the goal is to stay alive while completing particular tasks. The music and colors exude a warm, friendly vibe, contributing to wholesome fun. Characters have unique voice clips and Puyo popping effects, and even the Puyo are loaded with personality, glomming together when paired up or looking sad when placed alone. Plus, there is an option to connect the Game Boy Color's *Pocket Puyo Puyo Sun* using the Transfer Pak to access additional artwork. Puzzle fans looking for a party game should look no further.

Reflections: The word *yon* means "four" in Japanese, hence where *Puyo Puyo~n Party*, the fourth game in the series, gets its name. Each console received a version with noticeable differences, such as the Dreamcast using the VMU for extra functionality with Carbuncle, the PlayStation version getting a Curry Story where players collect curry ingredients, and a Game Boy Color version that is wholly its own thing (but can't connect to the N64 version with the Transfer Pak like its predecessor, weirdly). Though the fourth entry felt noticeably slower than the third due to the lack of Sun Puyo amplifying garbage Puyo drops, it shines with a unique flavor, delivering a satisfying Puyo experience. – CPr

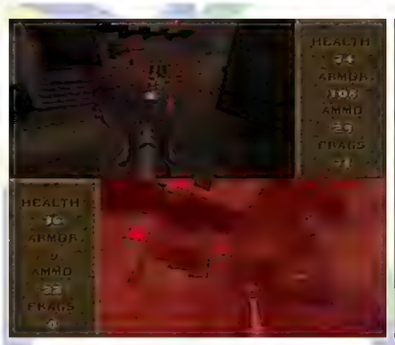
Quake 64

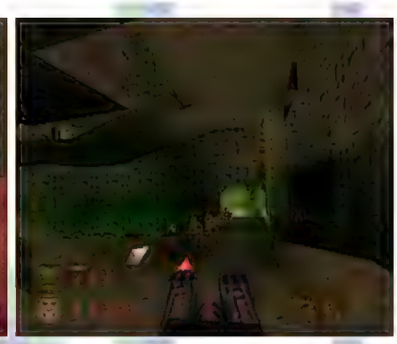
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Mar. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: id Software
Ported by: Midway Home Entertainment
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆



In this console conversion of the PC first-person shooter, players take control of a marine tasked to defeat an evil interdimensional being that is codenamed "Quake." In four episodes of several stages each, the player starts with a shotgun and an axe and must proceed through the mainly Gothic castle and temple stages, blasting evil marines, knights, and zombies. The goal is to reach the exits by using switches to activate doors and elevators and acquiring silver and gold keys to traverse the contained wraparound layouts. Finding better weapons, health pickups, and armor is critical for survival, as even basic enemies can be a handful. Common foes like the chainsaw- and grenade launcher-wielding Ogre are tough, and the double-barrelled shotgun, rapid-fire nailgun, or grenade launcher are needed to stand a chance. More formidable enemies such as the Yeti-like Shambler or homing-missile-firing, spider-esque Vore are downright painful to encounter – they may require better weapons like the super nailgun, rocket launcher, and lightning-zapping Thunderbolt. However, ammo for these weapons can be scarce, making it an uphill struggle to stay properly armed to fight back. The Pentagram of Protection and Quad Damage power-ups are lifesavers to help bust through waves of enemies that would otherwise overwhelm. While engaging, firefights are occasionally undermined by annoying sections where players must jump to and from narrow platforms, sometimes while being fired upon. This platforming, along with awkward swimming segments, can bring progress and enjoyment to a halt. The visuals are adequate, although the sound effects and music are not too memorable. A split-screen two-player deathmatch mode is available with five maps, but it is pretty bare bones. While a technically fine experience, this shooter sacrifices design and balance in favor of delivering an overwhelming challenge.

Reflections: After doing a great job with *Doom 64*, id Software tasked Midway to bring their follow-up first-person-shooter franchise to the console. *Quake* was one of the first true 3D FPS games, and it utilized a polygonal graphic style that was the standard on the Nintendo 64. I think there was something lost in translation here, though, as the N64 controller just isn't as adept as the ol' keyboard and mouse combo, leading to frustrating moments that were a bit easier when I played it on the PC. If you see *Quake* as a *Doom* clone in style, look, plot, etc., that was by design. At the time, id Software didn't want to venture too far from what brought them success with *Doom*. This created friction between id Software co-founders John Romero and John Carmack, and Romero left the company following *Quake*'s computer release. – PC





European Cartridge

UK Cartridge with Age Rating

Quake II

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: June 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Raster Productions
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

The cybernetic Strogg race is attacking Earth, but they have to deal with a tough Space Marine across 19 stages of fluid and brutal first-person-shooter action. Each stage has an exit the player must reach by first fulfilling mission objectives – displayed on screen – such as collecting keys, deactivating force fields, using terminals, and more. Armed initially with a rechargeable (but weak) side-arm, the player must blast through guards armed with blasters, shotguns, or machine guns and muscular, chain gun-wielding Enforcers. Mowing down these foes by picking up a shotgun or machine gun is essential. However, tangling with more powerful Strogg like the Gunner (with machine gun AND grenade launcher) or the rocket-launcher-packing female Iron Maiden requires something heavier, like the super shotgun, chain gun, grenade launcher, rocket launcher, or hyper blaster. In later stages, the penetrating power of the rail gun and devastating BFG 10K can thankfully be unleashed. Ammo is not very plentiful, and most fallen enemies do not drop any, so steady aim is required not to waste precious shots during combat. Health and armor pickups are fairly common, but it is still easy to take a beating and be sent back to the beginning of a stage. Items like the power shield or invisibility found in secret areas can be very helpful. Still, the most desirable may be the Quad Damage power amplifier that can dish out explosive offensive power for a limited time. Environmental hazards like slime and traps can be a nice distractive nuisance, but the ongoing battles in the small, self-contained stages are the violent draw. The controls are mostly adequate in moving, strafing, and free aiming, but it may be tough to get used to the sensitivity of the Control Stick (controls are customizable). Aiming up/down to deal with enemies like the Flyers and jet-packed Icarus soldiers can be annoying. Game sound effects are pronounced and distinct (the alien sounds are accomplished), and the moody music effectively creates a creepy ambiance. The visuals impress with detailed characters and good lighting effects, and using the optional Expansion Pak helps increase the colors, detail, and frame rate. Multiplayer options are impressive and include Deathmatch, FragTeams, FlagWars, and DeathTag for up to four. While not perfect, this ferocious first-person shooter does the job for players looking to gib some aliens (or friends).

Reflections: Like *Doom 64*, *Quake II* on the N64 is not a direct port of the classic PC game but rather a unique title. While it shares the same gameplay, sounds, enemies, and weapons as its computer predecessor, the number of maps has been halved, and the layouts of the ones that made it to the N64 are much different and more constrained, resulting in an entirely different game. While this version is a fine experience, I cannot recommend it over the *Quake II* masterpiece found on the computer, which was groundbreaking in 1997. – PC

European Cartridge

Quest 64

Holy Magic Century (EU), Eltale Monsters (JP)
Genre: Action-RPG
Release Date: June 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Imagineer
Publisher: THQ (NA), Imagineer (JP), Konami (PAL)
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Celtland's fate lies in the hands of apprentice-magician Brian, whose father went missing a month earlier when he ventured out to track down the stolen Eletale book. Brian will travel linear paths through valleys, forests, and plains that connect towns, dungeons, and new areas of Celtland to explore in this RPG with action elements. A 3D camera automatically positions itself behind Brian's movements reasonably well and can be re-centered by holding B. New quests received in towns are adjacent to Brian's goals, like tracking down a stolen Earth Orb from a thief with connections to the Eletale Book. While traveling between towns and in dungeons, random, turn-based battles activate against creatures ranging from Magma Fish to sinister Scarecrows. These battles emanate from a large octagon, and Brian and each enemy have their own surrounding smaller octagon to move within each turn freely. Close-quarter attacks with Brian's staff and a variety of magic spells are the means of offense available. Brian can move in his octagon while being attacked, making it possible to evade spells and attacks. Brian has four core attributes (hit points, magic points, defense, agility) that naturally improve with more time invested in each area. For example, agility increases the longer Brian travels on foot and defense increases as more blows are absorbed throughout battles. Spells belong to four elements (earth, water, fire, wind), and each one has 50 levels obtained by discovering hidden spirit gems that are randomly dispersed after battles. The higher an element's level, the more spells are unlocked under each element, with certain ones like Avalanche and Water Pillar proving especially effective. Experimenting with magic and manually maneuvering away from enemy attacks makes battles engaging and fun. However, this is offset by the lackluster dungeons and bland overworlds that usually involve plodding in a singular direction with little to break up the journeying. The 3D visuals stand out, with excellent graphical design for nearly every character and villain and exquisite spell animations being the highlights. They are complemented with a fitting whimsical score that captures the sense of adventure. While the back-to-basics gameplay makes this more applicable for RPG newcomers, veterans may be turned off by the lack of customization, cookie-cutter narrative, and relatively short adventure time.

Reflections: *Quest 64* was heavily anticipated upon its 1998 release because it was the first RPG on the N64, following a wealth of quality RPGs on NES and SNES. When RPG-starved N64 owners discovered this release had only one playable character, no currency, zero additional weapons or armor to acquire, and a complete lack of other RPG staples like puzzles and mini-games, they were understandably not pleased. With all that in mind, I still consider this a solid entry-level RPG and a worthy palate-cleanser after heartier adventures. A year later, the Japanese version implemented numerous minor improvements and a more fleshed-out ending. – DK

European Cartridge
Holy Magic Century

Japanese Cartridge
Eltale Monsters

(Tom Clancy's) Rainbow Six

Genre: First-Person Shooter, Strategy
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Red Storm Entertainment
Ported by: Saffire
Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

This groundbreaking, tactical, first-person shooter is a PC title port based on Tom Clancy's military-fiction novel. Players must covertly respond to an eco-terrorist group's attacks, transpiring over 12 unique missions and enjoyed in either a one-player or two-player co-operative mode. Each assignment contains two primary parts: planning and execution. Quick Start allows skipping the planning and diving directly into the action, but it can be counterintuitive. During the planning stage, players are briefed on objectives, review intel, and select the team's roster. Up to four operatives are selected for each mission, each with varying aggression, leadership, stamina, teamwork, stealth, and tech and weapon skills. Team uniforms of varying colors and camouflage are available in light, medium, and heavy armor. Weapons (handguns, rifles, submachine guns, and a shotgun that vary in size and firepower) and equipment (grenades, flashbangs, extra magazines, heartbeat sensors, kits) are equipped here as well. Planning is critical for a successful team strategy, such as embarking on the mission objectives as one unit or using a "divide and conquer" scheme. The player controls the Team Leader while the squad acts out predetermined commands: Engage, Advance, Escort, and Special (flashbang and grenade attacks) that can be changed as the mission requires. Rainbow operatives and enemies may die after absorbing only one or two bullets, providing a sense of realism. A targeting reticle assists in weapon aiming, improving the likelihood of hitting enemies from a distance. However, an up-close and personal sneak shot may be more efficient. Night-vision goggles are crucial for evening missions when the graphics remain dark and muddy. Later-stage objectives include ones such as intel gathering, disarming bombs, and capturing enemy leaders. These break up the monotony of the early hostage-saving tasks. Applying different strategies for success over several difficulty levels can reveal replayability from a somewhat short campaign. Overall, the heavy focus on tactical and stealth aspects may not appeal to those expecting rapid-fire action. Even with shortcomings, the distinctive planning and gameplay elements are engaging, completing this title's strategic objectives.

Reflections: *Rainbow Six* was the first title in a multi-platform gaming franchise that continues today. It was a risk for Red Storm to port this complicated PC game onto the more restrained cartridge format, and four missions from the computer did not make it to the N64. Historically, tactical shooters that rely heavily on brains over brawn have never been my cup of tea. However, missions that were simple enough not to frustrate yet sufficiently nuanced to ensure I strategized to succeed won me over. The realism on display in *Rainbow Six* sets this game and the franchise apart from its FPS genre brethren. – JBr

European Cartridge

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Rakugakids

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP, PAL
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Kobe
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

What would a doodle do if given life? In this side-view 2D fighter, the answer is battle. Nine zany scribbles (scrawled and conjured from magical crayons) now squiggle with dimension, reflecting the imagination of the kids who drew them. Fighters spend their days brawling across Twinkle Town with a repertoire of wacky attacks only a drawing could devise. Each doodle comes equipped with three levels of punches and kicks: weak attacks are fast but inflict little damage; strong techniques are slow but pack extra power; and moderate hits split the difference. Special techniques can also be unleashed with a bit of added finesse: a kick mixed with a quarter-roll of the D-pad, for instance, allows the groovy Captain.Cat.Kit to fling himself like a spinning disc. The most outlandish fun comes from using magic. A Magic Bar slowly fills by fighting and taking damage, ultimately unlocking a trio of super combos specializing in defensive, offensive, and counterattack possibilities. These combos allow special actions like the spellcasting Marsa to escape pursuers by rocketing them skyward via a monstrous flower (a defensive play) or the alienesque Mamezo to order a pizza, thereby running opponents over with the incoming delivery vehicle (an offensive maneuver). The cast can also double-jump for heightened mobility, dash left or right, and block attacks by backing away at sensible moments. In addition to Story, Versus, and Practice modes, there is an innovative training feature by which players can let the CPU learn their style and approach and then have it fight on their behalf. The real draw of this strange foray is the presentation. Characters move with a gooey fluidity rarely seen on the system and are punctuated by a bevy of humorous themes, expressions, and techniques that make these screwball scrawls endearing. The suburban stages are colorful if simplistic, with peppy surfer tunes furthering the madcap energy. The experience relies too much on its cute appearance wowing players, leaving the fighting itself a little stiff and less than satisfying. Still, for a uniquely presented fighter, it is worth trying out solo or against a competitor. After all, what's a little magical wax between friends?

Reflections: In many ways, *Rakugakids* (a portmanteau of the Japanese word *rakugaki*, meaning "doodle," and the English word *kid*) is what *Clay Fighter 63⅓* should have been. While the latter crafted a crass, uninspired roster of twisted archetypes, then grafted upon them a slew of choppy moves and incoherent motivations, this arthouse endeavor takes a sweeter approach. Indeed, the lively sprites that animate *Rakugakids* brim with an optimism sadly lost on its contemporary. Even Mamezo, the rubbery villain, is almost lovable in his overwrought movements, accomplishing what *Clay Fighter* couldn't with its own two amorphous stars, Blob and the elastic Taffy. – DA

Japanese Cartridge

Rally Challenge 2000

Rally '99 (JP)
Genre: Racing
Release Date: June 2000
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Genki
Publisher: SouthPeak Interactive (NA), Imagineer (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

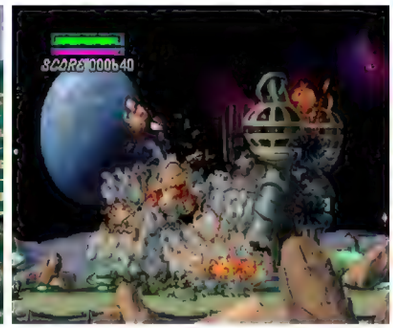
Dash around nine tracks and drive nine officially licensed vehicles in this first- or third-person rally racing game. Nine official World Rally Championship rides make up the roster, each with individual steering, torque, and speed stats. Most of the nine international courses are dirt-based, so precision is critical when approaching tight turns. The driving mechanics here have touchy brake and acceleration controls, requiring consistent trial and error going into every turn. Players should spend time in the pre-race settings screen to get every advantage going into those track twists and curves by altering the car's tires, steering, suspension, and gear ratios. The player's vehicle can suffer damage, dropping in speed and effectiveness and making the already tricky controls even more painful. (Fortunately, this damage mechanic is exclusive to Championship mode.) Players skipping this step will find themselves flubbing turns and crashing into walls due to touchy handling. Once a car is prepped, head to the single-player Championship mode and start racing. The clocked finishing time determines final placement, not position relative to other racers. Points are awarded at the end of each race based on these times, and the driver that tallies up the most leaderboard points at the end of all nine courses will be declared the winner of the Championship. Fighting to get ahead of competitors is pointless, as they act as dummy cars for decoration. Arcade mode is a breezier affair that lets players race a single lap across three different tracks, and this time, the finishing position does matter. Two more modes (solo Practice and VS for up to four players) round out the offerings. The split-screen perspective in the latter adds a border to condense the multiplayer action and maintain a stable frame rate. The rally cars have a decent amount of detail, complemented by graphical touches like dirt and debris flying from the track and supplemental weather effects like cars kicking up waves of mist during rainfall. Conveniently, an announcer declares the severity of upcoming turns, giving players a chance to prepare. There is also a decent variety of upbeat rock tunes, underscoring the action. Sadly, the above-average audiovisuals do not make up for touchy controls and the awful Championship mode. There are no new tracks or cars to unlock, giving rally racers little reason to return for seconds.

Reflections: *Rally Challenge 2000* was a follow-up of sorts to *MRC: Multi-Racing Championship*, another rally racer from 1997 developed by Genki and published by Imagineer in Japan. I lost count of how many tweaks I did in the pre-race settings to get optimum functionality out of the cars. Eventually, I stumbled upon a combination that worked, but that investment only made the rest of the experience feel lackluster by comparison. Why bother fine-tuning performance when there's so little fun afterward? One interesting takeaway is how the otherwise unremarkable announcer whispers "go" three times at the beginning of every race. That's not exactly the best way to get me pumped. Maybe if this were a competitive napping game set in a library, it would have been a better fit. – DK

Japanese Cartridge
Rally '99

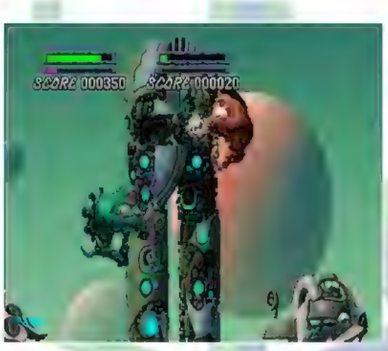
Rampage 2: Universal Tour

Genre: Action
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Avalanche Software
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆



Bring destruction to cities worldwide as monstrous kaiju in this side-scrolling arcade action title. Beasts George, Lizzle, and Ralph have been captured, and it is up to a giant lobster, rat, and rhino to save them. Each stage consists of several buildings that must be stomped, smashed, and walloped to progress. Up to three players can punch, kick, jump, and climb their way up and literally through buildings one by one in cities like New York City, Tokyo, and London. Standing in their way is an assortment of military enemies, police, and townsfolk armed to the teeth. The player has an energy meter and a set number of lives that deplete rapidly, but humans are edible, and there's a host of food items that restore health and fill the power gauge. Once full, players can unleash a super move that decimates buildings and foes such as tanks, choppers, and gunships. Open windows on buildings reveal power-ups when smashed, including super punches, invincibility, and pepper, which create a sneeze to destroy entire floors. Some items impair the player, such as fireplaces and electric boxes, both of which cause severe damage. Controls are relatively simple, yet somehow feel sluggish. However, it feels very satisfying pulverizing everything to dust, and kicking pedestrians (or eating them) never gets tiresome. Once George, Ralph, and Lizzie are rescued, players can utilize them to wreak havoc and help defend the Earth from an eventual alien invasion. Single-player can get repetitive, but multiplayer can shine. Players can turn damage off in the options and smash each other senseless for an absolute riot. A password menu allows additional unlocks, including six other playable characters and a hidden cheat list. Outside of this, the action does not offer all that much apart from shallow arcade thrills. It is still a fun, destructive pleasure, if even for a short while.

Reflections: I'd have played *Rampage 2* senseless if I were a kid when it was released, as it's just unhinged, mindless fun. I still have fond memories of battering my brother on the Commodore 64 version. Sometimes, you just want to switch your brain off and chuckle as things go boom, and *Rampage 2* will scratch that itch for a while. This game has much more life as a multiplayer title, which is how it is meant to be played. That leaves solo mode feeling a little threadbare. Sure, there are loads of levels, but there just isn't enough variety to be had for long-term enjoyment. This is the kind of activity that is great with friends when a couple of beers are involved. – JE

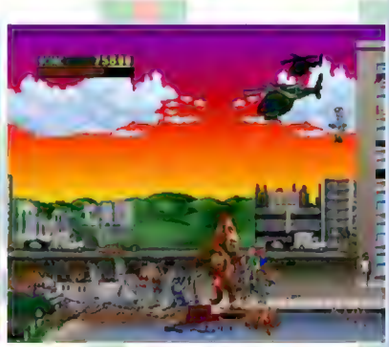


European Cartridge

Rampage World Tour

Genre: Action
Release Date: Mar. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Game Refuge
Ported by: Saffire
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Three technicians working for Scumlabs are exposed to toxins, mutating them into giant monsters of destruction – George (giant ape), Lizzie (giant lizard), and Ralph (giant wolf). Up to three players can take control of these beasts as they help wipe out an evil corporation in this side-scrolling side-view smash 'em up. Each monster can punch, jump, and kick to turn buildings into piles of rubble, one piece at a time, through cities worldwide. Out to stop their rampage are police, military, and Scumlabs defenses, who throw out waves of troops, helicopters, tanks, and mechs. Bullets and explosions constantly drain the player's health meter from these adversaries, but a large variety of food (and people!) can be eaten to stay alive. Open windows contain points bonuses and power-ups, such as the ability to scream and tear down entire buildings or a power punch that can take out floors of teetering skyscrapers. A special toxic waste consumable changes the player's monster into V.E.R.N. – a giant bat that can decimate the entire stage in seconds. A flag or billboard appears at random in stages. When punched, the scene changes to the next level in that country. The goal is to eradicate Scumlabs' factories in all 16 destinations, or the action loops back to the first level. Once complete, the end-game triggers and sends players to fight the evil Eustas DeMonic on his moon base. The difficulty level is unwaveringly high, even from the start. Continues are available, but expect to use them up rapidly. In multiplayer, the players are awarded point bonuses after each level depending on who outperformed the other for bragging rights. An arcade experience in every sense of the word, this is great fun in small bursts but features extremely repetitive core gameplay. It manages to shine when multiple friends sit down to destroy things together, but as a solo experience, it quickly becomes a monotonous march: smash, rinse, and repeat.

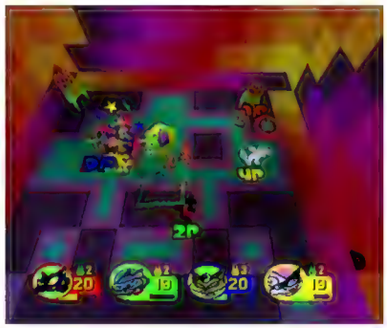


Reflections: For 10 minutes, *Rampage World Tour* is a hoot. Aside from occasionally swapping a helicopter for a UFO sprite or a locale change once you've punched your first building down, you've experienced most of what the game has to offer. Waiting for the flag/billboard to appear to progress is an absolute nuisance. The thought about the stage flags hadn't occurred to me until I hit around stage 50 and noticed everything was looping. This N64 title is the only version outside of the arcade original that supports three players, so in that respect, it is definitely the best version to go for. Just make sure to play this as a multiplayer experience. – JE

European Cartridge

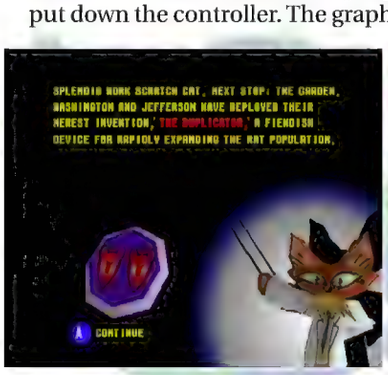
Rat Attack!

Genre: Action
Release Date: Sept. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Pure Entertainment Games
Publisher: Mindscape
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆☆



A pair of evil mutant masterminds (who happen to be rats) have hatched a plan for world domination! With an army of pernicious rodents at their command, Washington and Jefferson give the orders to destroy everything. However, the heroic Scratch Cats will not let that happen. In this top-down action title, the player chooses between Sparky, Hi-Jinx, Manx, and five other fearless feline warriors to catch and eliminate the invading rats across a series of dangerous levels. Each cat has a distinct set of strengths and weaknesses in three categories: Speed, Strength, and Eraticator range. The Eraticator is a kind of electrified lasso that ensnares the enemy. Once wrangled, a captured rat must be disposed of by taking it to each level's Destructor Pad, which decimates the fuzzy foes once and for all. Each level tasks the player with hunting down a set amount of rats indicated at the top of the screen. Players must capture and destroy the given number in each room before they devour everything in sight, then use the doorway to exit to the next level. Players must be alert for dangers like run-away vacuum cleaners, fire-spewing ovens, and snarling dogs! Getting hit by one of these obstacles (or by a prowling rat) depletes one unit of health and releases any vermin caught in the Eraticator. Players are vastly outnumbered by foes, traps, and other dangers, but a bevy of power-ups helps keep them in the game, including speed boosts, temporary invincibility, and rat bait. Each hero also has a unique Special Attack that can be unleashed by collecting enough Cat Coins, like Smokey's Satellite Support, which calls down a laser strike from the sky to obliterate nearby rats. The action intensifies in over fifty levels through additional obstacles, foes, and the occasional boss battle. The fluid controls and progressive challenge make it hard to put down the controller. The graphics are chunky and primitive, and the jaunty music is as generic and redundant as it gets, but the frantic gameplay overcomes these flaws. For even more frenetic fur-flying fun, grab friends and compete to ice the most rodents in one of three modes (Score Chase, Rat Chase, and Beat the Clock). The overall goal is pretty simple, but like a beguiled rat compelled by a wedge of cheddar, the action will have players returning for more.

Reflections: Sometimes, it's the simple games that are the most addictive. *Rat Attack!* is not a perfect action title (the hitboxes seem a little off, and the controls can feel overly sensitive). Still, adjusting to those minor imperfections becomes very easy, as the gameplay is generally smooth and rewarding, and there's a lot of fast-paced fun to be had. *Rat Attack!* isn't an overstuffed hoagie piled high with cold cuts, lettuce, tomato, and all the fixings. It's just the cheese, but it's good cheese. – DM



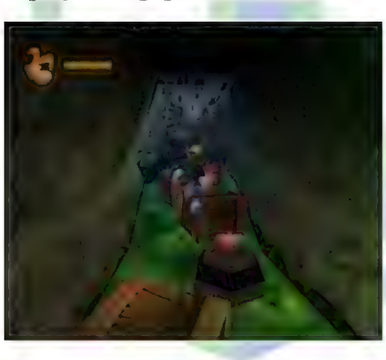
European Cartridge

Rayman 2: The Great Escape

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

The Glade of Dreams is under attack from Razorbeard and his dastardly crew of Robo-Pirates, and it's up to Rayman to save the day! This third-person perspective platformer puts the player in control of Rayman as he navigates the numerous levels standing between him and his planet's liberation. Rayman's skills include jumping, gliding, climbing, and shooting energy balls at foes. Players can also use temporary abilities in certain areas to conquer specific challenges, like a limited flight skill in one stage. The 18 mostly linear levels are designed with platforming challenges and a few simple puzzles, intercut with a healthy dose of action-oriented trials. For example, there are sections where Rayman must slide at breakneck speed down mossy slopes, steer a wild rocket through an obstacle course, and swing from sequences of rings suspended over perilous pits. Rayman is controlled primarily with two buttons: one to jump/glide and one to fire energy blasts used to destroy enemies, break objects, and activate switches. Other buttons control camera functions but are rarely needed, thanks to each area's usually excellent default camera angles. Combat involves locking onto an opponent and rapid-firing energy balls while avoiding their attacks. Battling foes becomes dull quickly since their attacks are elementary to predict, they die very quickly, and few of them provide any challenge. If the enemies are few, however, the bosses are downright rare and only slightly more challenging to defeat than the ordinary enemies. Rayman's limbless aesthetic facilitates over-the-top animations that are always fun to watch. The environments and enemies are similarly visually excellent, though the music isn't particularly good or bad. While combat isn't all that fun, most of the time will be spent hopping and blasting through meticulously crafted, fast-paced, and diverse environmental challenges. There are plenty of those to keep players engaged until the end.

Reflections: Many of the 3D platformers of this generation are collect-a-thons, where you have to retrieve baubles from open environments to unlock new levels and powers, frequently backtracking to grab enough to continue your progress. There's nothing wrong with that structure, but I found it refreshing that *Rayman 2* takes a more linear approach to platforming. While you'll need to obtain a certain number of Lums, yellow fairy-like creatures that comprise the bulk of the game's collectibles, to advance at times, the number you need is low and can easily be surpassed by obtaining obvious ones in levels. It's a different take on the genre at the time, and it stands on its own as a fun game, even without comparing it to its peers. – JM

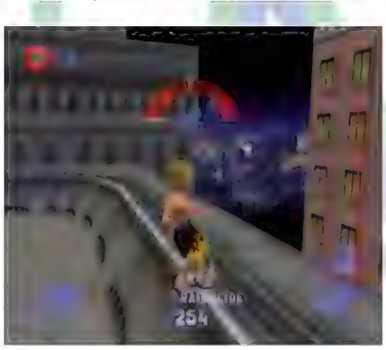


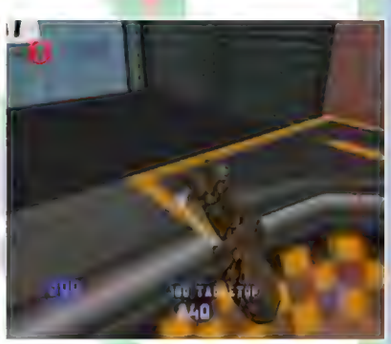
European Cartridge

Razor Freestyle Scooter

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 2001
Region: NA
Developer: Shaba Games
Ported by: Titanium Studios
Publisher: Crave Entertainment
Players: 1-2
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆

Norton the robot has kidnapped the Razor crew, and it's up to the player to get them back by flipping, tricking, and stunting on a genuine Razor scooter. In this radical third-person adventure, scoot around building speed and jumping off ramps to gain more airtime, then hit a direction on the Control Stick along with either C-right or C-left to execute a trick. Hitting C-up lets the scooter snap to rails and edges for grinding. Players start with two characters, Chad and Ami, and can select the color of their scooter's handlebars from such extreme options as red, blue, green, and black. Neither the characters nor the scooters change gameplay, so pick a favorite and jump into the three courses: the relatively simple and blocky scooter park, the slightly hipper schoolyard, and the clock tower, where players can stunt and style from deadly heights. Within those three courses are some unique set pieces, such as a row of school buses at the school level or a Big Ben-style clock to grind around in the clock tower, though there's ultimately very little to differentiate them. Each course gives two minutes to complete objectives, with the main one being to rack up a high enough score by performing tricks and grinding on rails. There is an option to play with a friend, though it just involves taking turns trying to claim a high score. Other objectives include grinding a cumulative distance on rails, hitting a higher "extreme" score, performing a high-point trick, earning bonus time by filling up a trick meter, and collecting several scooter wheels placed throughout the stage. Completing an objective across all stages (like hitting all extreme scores) unlocks a small challenge course that tasks the player with collecting all wheels before time runs out. Beating the bonus courses unlocks more characters, such as Chippie the sock monkey, Tiki Man the Tiki man, Brittany the other girl, real-life MMA fighter Tito Ortiz, and even Norton the robot. Graphically, things look generic, with basic shapes and flat colors, and a soundtrack of weak "skate jams" also fails to stand out.





Crashing does sound surprisingly good, which may send the wrong message to players. If playing the same three courses on a two-minute timer while listening to generic rock music sounds like a good time, lucky day. Otherwise, it's a wipeout.

Reflections: *Razor Freestyle Scooter* tapped into the Razor scooter craze that was infecting every youth at the time, but this title is more interesting to talk about than actually play. A robot kidnapped some kids and will only return them if you prove you can scoot real good! That should be incredibly fun! Tapping more into the late '90s/early '00s vibe, this was exclusive to Blockbuster Video stores in North America. When that two-minute timer ran out, it was probably quickly returned for another game. Let someone else faceplant with this one while you sit it out. – CPr

Re-Volt

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios London
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Toy Volt's radio-controlled (R/C) cars have gained free will, and now they compete in races! Control one of 42 bite-sized rides in a first- or third-person point of view as players dash to the finish line, dodging attacks and fighting for power-ups along the way. The action occurs across 13 different courses, including an artifact-filled museum, obstacle-laden neighborhoods, and a wild west-themed ghost town. Four difficulty levels increase or decrease the precision required to control effectively: crank it to the max, and cars frequently spin out, or turn it down for a more precise experience. In addition to navigating obstacles, dodge power-up attacks from competitors, including fireworks, bombs, and water balloons. Getting some practice runs in the Single Race mode is recommended to grasp the sneaky stage design fully. Otherwise, ramming into surprise walls happens frequently (it came out of nowhere!). Players will spend most of their playtime in Championship mode, earning gold cups to unlock new cars and tracks. They can also unlock vehicles by beating records in Time Trial or collecting stars in the Stunt Arena. Split-screen multiplayer is available for up to four players in Single Race or Battle Tag modes. The latter has cars bumping into each other to become "it," so their two-minute timer can count down to zero, snagging a hard-earned victory. After exhausting all these modes and courses, let the imagination take over and create additional tracks with the Track Editor, making them as challenging or chill as the heart desires. The core racing action is engaging but is held back by ambiguous course design filled with turns and passageways that blend into environments. Only letting four racers compete at any given time is also a bit of a letdown. The vibrant visuals win back a few points, however, and the thumping techno tunes are an unconventional fit for R/C mayhem. Steer clear of the higher difficulty levels that lead to endless frustration, and most players should discover a gratifying racing experience ready for consumption.

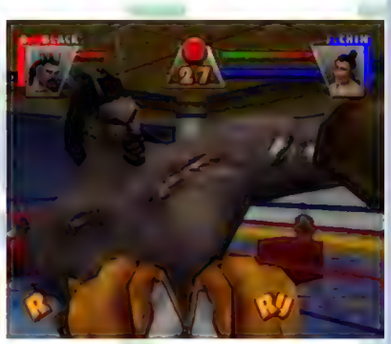
Reflections: Revisiting *Re-Volt* on the Nintendo 64 was an absolute delight. It was, and still is, a solid racing game that offers a lot of entertainment with few major flaws. My fondest memories about it came from an online multiplayer version that was only available for a few months during the original Xbox Live beta. It was thrilling to be a part of *Re-Volt*'s brief return; it became my go-to online game despite being a few years old at the time. *Re-Volt* never had an official Xbox release after that, though it did live on with a sequel, an arcade release, Windows, PlayStation, Dreamcast versions, and limited-release mobile ports as *Re-Volt Classic*. – DK

European Cartridge

Ready 2 Rumble Boxing

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Point of View
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Become a boxing legend in this cartoonish punch-up that lets players roam a 3D ring from various camera perspectives. 13 larger-than-life boxers are available to play as and fight against, from wise-cracking afro-clad lightweights to heavy-hitting sumo combatants. Basic punches and blocks map to single buttons on the controller. Each character also has a powerful special move activated by button sequences, like pressing back on the Control Stick, then forward and C-left to unleash Selene Strike's No Love attack. A stamina meter builds as attacks connect with an opponent. Players can activate improved attack and speed abilities when it is full or pull off a flooring super combo. Spelling "RUMBLE" by scoring big hits also lets players boost their power for a short time. Ring position matters when launching attacks or avoiding damage. The longer a boxer's reach, the slower they move, so paying attention to each character's stats is important, as they will greatly affect tactics in the ring. In Championship mode, players build a roster of fighters to earn money via fights. Earnings are spent on weight, punch bag, and vitamin training to level up each boxer's stats, helping them take down more challenging opponents. Once winning all ranked fights with a single boxer, another is unlocked to train and repeat the process. This mode has some longevity but becomes repetitive since each train-fight-train sequence is essentially the same. By contrast, Arcade mode is a shorter, more traditional "beat every opponent and rise up the ranks to become the champion" experience. The cartoonish presentation is excellent and allows for boxers with slapstick fighting styles and wild personalities. They even show bruises after being hit by a few punches. Secret unlockable characters and special moves add a little depth to the action, and Michael Buffer lends his voice and likeness to the ring, but overall, there are very few reasons to come back for more boxing. The madcap characters and wild action will satisfy that pugilistic itch in the short term, but it is not deep enough for a very long career in the ring.

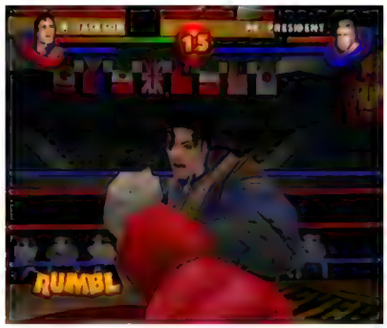


Reflections: *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing* was hyped to the moon before it came out. Fortunately, it absolutely nailed the boxing action, and the caricature stereotype brawlers are just the right kind of obnoxious. It was also released on Dreamcast, PlayStation, and Game Boy Color, where it was universally disliked (though it was one of the few games to have a rumble function built into the cart). Each of these releases had an exclusive boxer. N64 players got J.R. Flurry, a former Golden Gloves champion and Hollywood movie stuntman looking for his chance to become a boxing star. – JE

European Cartridge

Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2

Genre: Sports, Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Point of View
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



Lace up those prizefighting gloves and fight to become the Rumble Tournament champion in this boxing title with various camera views. Players move around the 3D ring with the analog stick, use each of the C-buttons to control a different type of high or low punch, and block with A and B. 17 over-the-top cartoon athletes are available, including a raft of secret characters such as the Clintons, Shaquille O'Neal, and Michael Jackson. Each fighter has their own special move, which causes extra damage when it connects. For example, Angel Rivera's spin uppercut is performed by pressing back, forward, and the C-up button. Boxers also have a combo move, which, stamina permitted, starts a huge attack. Landing big hits spells out 'RUMBLE' one letter at a time, allowing players to unleash a flurry of quicker punches and harder hits that can knock the opponent clean out of the ring. Championship mode is the main event, where the player must train boxers one at a time to win the title. Training stats like strength, endurance, and stamina require completing mini-games (jump rope, punch pads, weightlifting) where players hit the correct C-button at the right time to earn more points. Those improvements let a boxer punch harder, take more blows, or throw more fists in the next match. Up to eight players can participate in a bracket tournament, and a two-player team battle mode is available where a team of boxers is chosen in an endurance fight. A standard one-on-one arcade mode is also available, which is where secret characters can be unlocked via wins. The slapstick presentation is fantastic, and announcer Michael Buffer handles in-ring introductions. Punches feel weighted, and the game of pugilistic chess on offer is fun, but there isn't enough variety to warrant repeat play. After one run through Championship mode, boredom may set in. There are plenty of unique personalities, but they boil down to a basic move set and are really only good for a few quick laughs. If the championship mode had some extra features, such as building or managing a gym, this would win the heavyweight title.

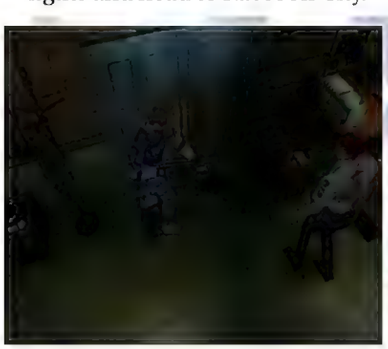
Reflections: As with its predecessor, *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2* delivers a good bout of boxing. The problem is it doesn't improve upon the original, except for a few new mini-games, two throwaway multiplayer options, and a tweaked RUMBLE system. Compared to ports of the games on other platforms, the N64 version is also missing several secret characters. We still got Michael Jackson, at least, and small details like his gloves being covered in rhinestones are great fun. The pop star even did motion capture for his character's taunts and victory animations. – JE

Resident Evil 2

Biohazard 2 (JP)
Genre: Survival Horror
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Capcom
Ported by: Angel Studios
Pub.: Capcom Entertainment (NA, JP), Virgin Interactive (PAL)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

Get ready to run for dear life in this third-person zombie survival horror epic. Begin by choosing difficulty, level of violence, blood color, and character (Leon or Claire). Choosing to play as either Leon or Claire determines many factors: what weapons are available (such as Leon's shotgun or Claire's grenade launcher), which NPCs make appearances, and what moments in the story get addressed. The presentation features static cinematic camera angles from room to room that help set the horror vibe. The "tank" controls are here for the purist, but those looking for a change can use optional first-person controls that vastly improve responsiveness. Quick control and movement can mean life or death, as zombies can appear in previously empty areas, grab the player through windows, or ambush without warning. Running away is often the safest bet as ammunition can be hard to come by, particularly on higher difficulties. The difference between Normal and Easy difficulty is vast. Normal is for experienced players as it adds more and tougher enemies while reducing ammunition and maximum health. More importantly, it leaves fewer Ink Ribbons to be found, which are used to save progress. Interactive puzzles found from time to time can be challenging to decipher, such as moving statues into place. Still, with meticulous exploration, the answers will often fall into place. Exploring every nook and cranny will also yield hidden rewards, such as healing herbs and ammunition. Inventory space is limited, but storage boxes let players safely leave some items behind. Combining healing herbs or weapon parts frees up inventory space and improves their abilities. The presentation offers an engaging story with numerous cut-scenes, compelling (if somewhat dark) full-motion videos, and complete voice-over dialogue. The muffled sound quality during gameplay is due to the highly compressed audio. The corny voice-over dialogue and acting add a certain charm that makes for an enjoyable listen. Players who survive a playthrough can replay with the other character to see a second side of the story with more difficulty options, areas, zombies, and bosses to scare the bejeezus out of them. Anyone who enjoys gloomy, spooky, creepy, bloody, gory, and delightfully scary situations should turn out the lights and head to Raccoon City.

Reflections: The *Resident Evil 2* N64 release is a marvel of engineering. Angel Studios probably hired magicians and acquired alien technology to port over the original PlayStation version, managing to fit a multi-disc game on one cartridge. Then, they did some voodoo to fix the abysmal tank controls, added exclusive items like the EX Files, and randomized item placement on subsequent playthroughs. Sound issues aside, this is the definitive console version. – BC

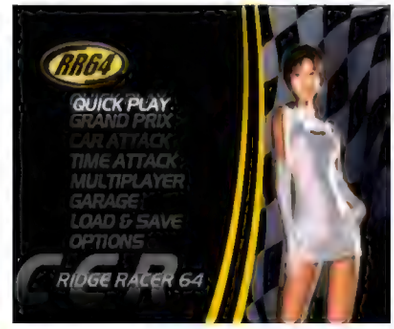


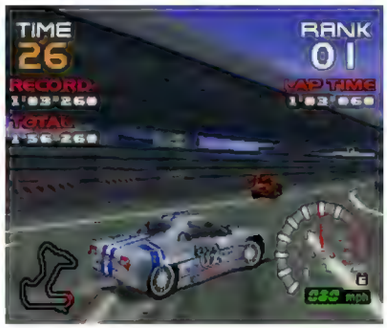
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge
Biohazard 2

Ridge Racer 64

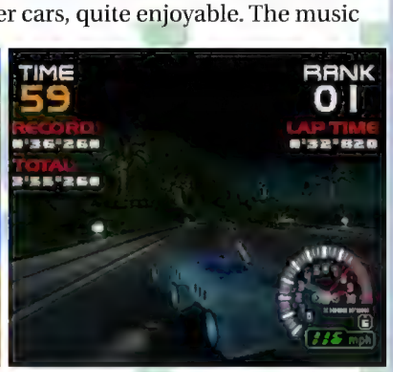
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Dev.: Nintendo Software Technology
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆





For those that enjoy a pure racing experience while balancing on the edge of control, buckle up! Quick Race mode starts up the action of the first track with the slowest car available (bo-ring!), while multiplayer allows up to four players simultaneously in either a single race (Battle Mode), stage race (Stage Mode), or race a stage in teams (Team Mode). However, mastering drifting skills is essential to spice up the cockpit/third-person gameplay with some faster cars. In Grand Prix mode, players will need to win a stage of three races before attempting Car Attack mode for a one-on-one battle to unlock a new car. Choosing a racer, color, and automatic or manual transmission precedes the action. While on the courses, proper drifting can take some practice, but it quickly becomes second nature to pull off consistently. When coming up to a turn, letting go of the gas, tapping the brake, then hitting the gas again while turning will start drifting. As the car drifts, players must steer in the opposite direction to keep it from spinning out. Taking a quick look at the mini-map is a good way of anticipating upcoming turns, and zooming out from the default cockpit view will also help. As the action progresses and players win new cars, the game speed increases dramatically. Since cars cannot be wrecked, hitting the sides of the track or other cars will only slow players down instead of completely stopping them. It's a nice touch because it maintains the frenetic, fast-paced racing feeling. There are 28 unlockable vehicles with some fun Namco surprises, such as the Galaga spaceship, Blinky the Ghost from Pac-Man, and even Pooka from Dig Dug. The track design is well done and lends itself perfectly to take advantage of the required drifting. There are also 20 tracks to race on; however, there are only three environments (Ridge Racer – cityscape, Revolution – countryside, and Renegade – desert) that these tracks utilize, so the courses feel very repetitive. The level of detail in the courses is very good, with some great visuals of towns and landscapes in the background. The frame rate is also solid with no discernable slowdown, which makes driving, especially the faster cars, quite enjoyable. The music is upbeat but uninteresting and repetitive, which is disappointing unless techno beats sound appealing. Also included is a Time Attack mode to beat a personal best and a Garage to view all unlocked cars, trophies, and track records. This experience has no power-ups to collect or money to earn, but it offers a blistering, fast, arcade-style racing experience that requires precision driving and quick reflexes.

Reflections: *Ridge Racer 64* is almost too fast. I had trouble enjoying the game at the faster speed classes as it was difficult for me to keep up. My eyes could barely react, let alone my fingers. Once I found that sweet spot of speed I could handle, I got a kick out of practicing my drifting. I even managed to do a 360, which was neat. If you are a fan of this series that originally premiered in arcades and on the PlayStation, this is a solid entry in the franchise only found on the Nintendo 64. – BC



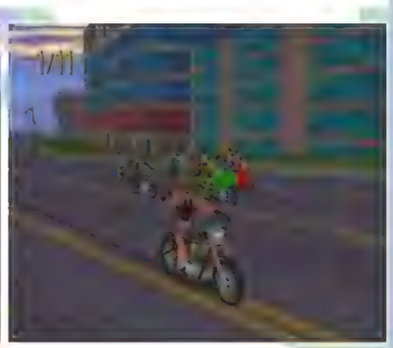
European Cartridge

Road Rash 64

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Dev.: Pacific Coast Power and Light
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Hop on the hog and hammer away at hooligans with this combat-heavy motorcycle mayhem title. The premise is simple: players take the role of a motorcycle rider racing other bikers and hitting those bikers with weapons or their hands/feet to get ahead. The third-person riding mechanics could not be more straightforward. Use extremities for all manner of skull cracking and weapon swinging. After selecting a driver/club (Thrashers or Rumblers) and a bike with different abilities, the racing begins, but speed usually takes a backseat to violence. Players start with fists, feet, and elbows but can progress to weapons via pick-ups or stealing from opponents. Players must make liberal use of this weaponry, ranging from a spiked club to a cattle prod, to take top honors when crossing the finish line. Power-ups are also available to increase the damage inflicted on competitors. Besides opponents, cars, trucks, and pedestrians on the road have to be navigated. The Big Game is the showcase event featuring five levels encompassing 38 races. "Rashers" must finish in the top three to progress. Tracks from a stage are connected, so players experience the same environment (city, countryside, seaside, etc.) in each new race within the same stage. Environments are a lowlight of the overall package, as everything looks similar after a while. However, it is difficult to focus on the scenery when Quick Nick rides up swinging a taser. New levels introduce faster opponents, longer tracks, and new weaponry to unleash. Shoving a pool cue into Officer Fenton's back spokes by level five will be second nature. Players who do not fend off the cops can be unceremoniously smacked to the pavement and arrested. Players need to pay a fine and get back on the road. However, if they run out of dough, it is game over. These fines and a lack of the necessary funds to finance bike repairs can shorten the experience. As fun as the single-player campaign can be, multiplayer is the real treat. Players have five options, like a classic deathmatch and tag, or racking up points by running over pedestrians. Regardless of which mode is selected, everyone's ears will thank them. The satisfying exclamations of pain exiting the combatants and the hard rock soundtrack that includes Sugar Ray fit exceptionally well here. This unusual and violent experience should appeal to many, biker or not, so players should take a stab at it.

Reflections: *Road Rash 64* is the fifth in a six-game series that started with *Road Rash* on the Sega Genesis. I've loved this series since I discovered it on the cable-only Sega Channel in 1994. I bought the first three entries for that console. However, I missed the fourth entry on the PlayStation, as I was a cash-strapped 16-year-old at the time. I later discovered *Road Rash 64* at a friend's house, and I'll share with you the most important thing I learned during that fall day: previous Road Rash games had a healthy balance between racing and fighting. This one is unbalanced; it's more of a fighting game than a racing game, but I think it's better because of it. – KS



European Cartridge

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Roadsters

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Titus Interactive
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

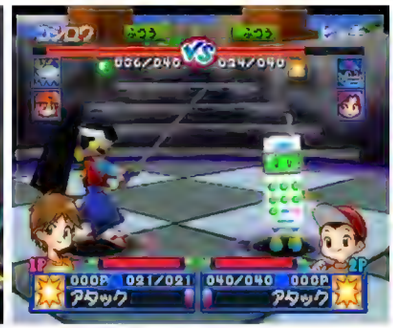
Over 30 optimized, open two-seaters are available to tear up asphalt, dirt, and snow-laden roads in this first- or third-person arcade racer. The mean machines available consist of both unlicensed and licensed varieties from manufacturers such as Toyota, Mitsubishi, and Lotus. The 10 tracks emanate from themed locations like an oil field, ski resort, and lumber mill, with unlockable reversed versions. Before each race, some light garage customization is worth looking into by selecting a preferred gearbox, suspension, and tires for each race. Some races will have evolving weather, as indicated on the forecast portion of the pre-race information screen, so pull over to the pit stop once the rain comes pouring and switch to wet tires for better handling on the road against the elements. Applying proper use of the brake and handbrakes is pivotal for successfully maneuvering through sharp turns. Mistiming corners or going off track at any point is excessively punishing as there is a severe, instant drop in speed. This detail makes the core racing feel unforgiving and tough to achieve a podium finish if spinning out early or misreading the course a couple of times. Putting in laps in Time Trial and Quick Race modes will help to memorize the track designs better and serve as recommended practice going into the Roadsters Trophy mode. This main single-player mode must be completed to unlock the superior machines that can be used across all modes, including four-player multiplayer. After picking from one of three vehicle class difficulties (each class has unique cars), drivers will be thrust into a season of six races. Accumulated points and cash are based on placement at the end of each race. Cash can lead to better garage customization upgrades, acquiring faster rides, and purchasing a license for the next season with harder AI competition. A solid visual package stands out from the finely crafted cars and convincing precipitation effects. However, the audio doesn't fare as well, with gratingly repeated taunts when passing rivals and an unmemorable score. There is a fun arcade racer tucked away here, but requiring a high tolerance for its gameplay sensitivities will deter it from frequent time in the pits.

Reflections: I'll remember a couple of unique takeaways from my time with *Roadsters*. One of them is that it goes against the grain of most lap-based arcade racers by making all its races five laps instead of the accustomed three laps. This difference resulted in a handful of times where I instinctively put down the controller after finishing the third lap (and being perplexed as to why the race wasn't yet over). Another peculiar design choice is locking away the Expansion Pak-enabled high-resolution graphics option behind a cheat code. Inputting "Extra rez" as the driver name will unlock high-resolution graphics for single-player races in the options menu. – DK

European Cartridge

Robot Ponkottsu 64: Nanatsu no Umi no Caramel

[Robopon 64: Caramel of the Seven Seas]
Genre: RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Red Company
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Transfer Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆

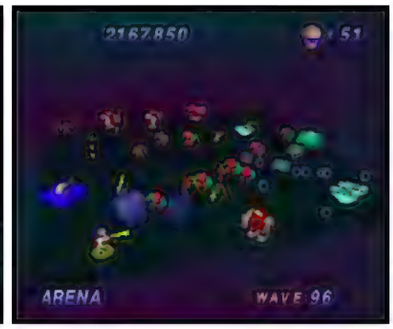


Robot Ponkottsu, or Robopon, are robotic monsters that humans use to battle one another and have myriad forms: tools, schoolgirls, samurai, toilets, phones, and more. In this 3D creature-collecting RPG, the protagonist and his grandfather sail a fish-shaped ship searching for treasures to summon the powerful Caramel Robopon. There are two selectable boy protagonists, each with a somewhat different story. The overall environment is an oceanic overworld with a fuel meter and mini-map. Small islands populate the seas, having shops, character conversations, or enemies. Pirate ships also float randomly; ramming them opens a 3D side-view battle screen. One Robopon from each combatant faces off, with icons showing others on their team. The player may move their Robopon, switch Robopon, or tell them to attack, though Robopon do not strike until their speed meter fills. Attack animations look nice but take time to play out. Moving Robopon away from the enemy increases the likelihood of dodging. When a Robopon's HP depletes, it is replaced with the next team member. After defeating all opposing Robopon, the player wins experience, ship fuel, and gold. Humanoid enemies are represented by dialogue and portraits alone but are drawn expressively. Particular islands have bosses that progress the story, opening pathways to new areas, and coliseum-like islands have a single Robopon fight a gauntlet of enemies on auto-pilot. Between battles, the player must switch to a lower deck side-view, controlling the character to talk with allies, sleep (which saves), and shepherd their Robopon. Each needs to be washed and fed, having meters for hunger and cleanliness. They have enriching activities that improve their stats, like fishing, shoveling fuel, and cleaning. Using tokens, Robopon can play mini-games, including a shooter, boat race, platformer, etc. Robopon may only perform three such actions per day (or none if it is too unhappy), with sleep refreshing them. Eventually, leveling up and caring for the Robopon becomes tiresome, and the repetitive soundtrack and visuals do too. There is some variety with a two-player mode identical to the single-player battles with more options. Also, the Transfer Pak enables players to transfer the Robopon trained within three Game Boy Robopon games into the N64 game. Still, these extras for this tedious entry in the series will not keep this robotic adventure afloat for more than a casual glance.

Reflections: Following the popularity of Pokémon, there were umpteen similar properties in the 1990s and 2000s, such as Digimon, Medabots, and Monster Rancher. Robopon was unsuccessful, only having a few Game Boy titles outside of Japan. I was a bit too old for Pokémon. Yet, somehow, Digimon managed to attract me, and I loved *Digimon World 2* for PlayStation, which has similarities to *Robopon 64*, which was around the same time. Both are very slow (I can honestly only recommend *DW2* to fans), but *Robopon 64* was comparatively arduous. It simply lacks the captivating creature designs and strong concept that the genre needs. – KN

Robotron 64

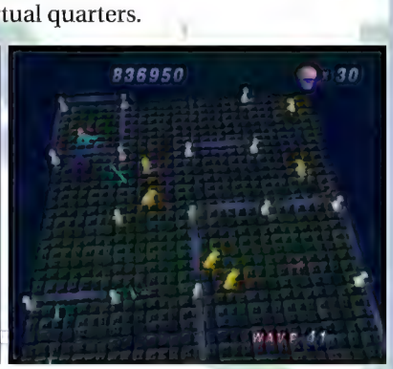
Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Jan. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Player 1
Publisher: Crave Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-2
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆



The twin-stick shooter returns in this hectic 3D update to the arcade classic. The evil Robotrons are intent on exterminating Earth's last surviving human family. Only the gun-happy Eugene packs enough power to blast these manufactured monstrosities into scrap and save humankind. The hero must scurry across 200 claustrophobic overhead square arenas, usually running in one direction while firing in another as killer machines enclose from all sides. Fortunately, the controls are both simple and intuitive. Players move with the Control Stick and use the C-buttons to fire, while L and R are for toggling camera perspectives, including angled overhead, straight overhead, and up close with the robotic foes. Purists can fire with the stick, use the D-pad for movement, or even employ a second controller's analog stick for true dual-stick running and gunning. Indeed, glory seekers need every advantage available to survive the many enemy types and their tendency to spawn at the worst possible times. Grunts, for instance, chase in relentless, single-minded herds. Invincible Hulks are more independent, seeking anything of flesh and bone, and humanoid Brains redefine "stream of consciousness" by flooding the screen with beams of mental energy. Saving the meandering humans will reward points. Encounters grow increasingly severe the longer Eugene perseveres, his foes always returning in stronger, more hardened forms. Power-ups like the Speed Up can help even the odds, but items like flamethrowers and three-shot spreads last for only seconds, while the trite 1-up – accrued predominately by earning points – prove critical to progression. Three difficulty settings help moderate the overall challenge, but players must face Normal or the nightmarish Insane to see everything, including the true final boss. Multiplayer comes in the form of two players taking turns running through the levels (separately), one life at a time. The graphics share the same garish chunkiness of its ancestor, but the shooter compensates with a pulsing techno soundtrack that encourages player immersion. A shortcoming here is one of missed opportunity – rote stage design, repetitive gameplay, and a lack of co-op support – which could have supported an upgrade to the classic. However, there is enough frantic action to support some virtual quarters.

Reflections: *Robotron 64* is like a gear stuck between "underwhelming" and "respectable," frustrating newcomers with its lack of ambition but impressing fans with its authentic, tried-and-true gunplay. The game captures the Williams 1982 classic's spirit exceptionally well – far better than many retro revivals do – yet never quite endears itself to those wanting more than 200 iterations of the same recycled gameplay. The lack of co-op especially hurts, but here's a pro tip: with two controllers, have one player play "pilot," and the other be "gunner." It works surprisingly well. – DA

European Cartridge



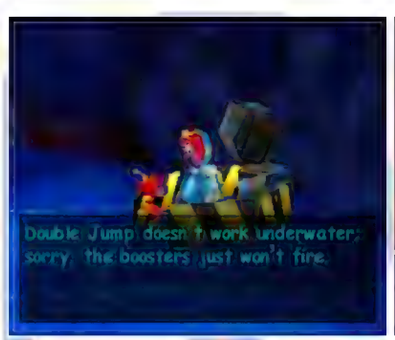
Rocket: Robot on Wheels

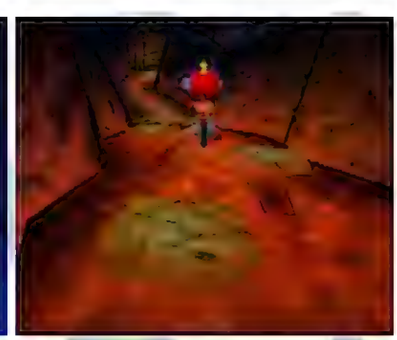
Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Sucker Punch Productions
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

As a robot assistant to an amusement park creator, Rocket must save Whoopie World from Jojo, a resentful squirrel, in this third-person 3D platformer. It is not easy, though; there is demanding platforming that requires mastery of movement as he needs to jump, swing, and grapple his way through the adventure across perilous paths. Starting in the central area, Rocket has only access to the first land of the park, Clowney Island. By collecting tickets and Tinker Tokens that are scattered throughout the park, more lands open, including the ancient Roman-styled Paint Misbehavin and the floating spires of Arabian Flights. Once a land is unlocked, he can leave and return at will. The goal in each land is to collect as many of the 12 tickets, 200 Tokens, and seven machine parts as he can find. The tickets enable Rocket to activate switches to open new Lands. He collects Tokens for Tinker, another helpful robot that gives him abilities like Double Jump, and upgrades to his tractor beam, such as the freeze ray. These advanced moves allow Rocket to acquire hard-to-reach objects and access new areas. The machine parts are used within their respective land to fix the ride that Jojo breaks, which gives Rocket further entry to locations within that land. Rocket is not equipped with traditional weapons. Fortunately, there are few enemies (like the annoying mosquito), but the situation still necessitates caution as there are many hazards, such as lava and bottomless pits. Losing all his health (represented as glowing atoms) from these dangers sends Rocket back to the land's entrance for another try at collecting those items. There are also vehicles to unlock with enough Tokens, and they have different control schemes for their varied purposes, from the FinBot that travels on water to the BeamLift that can lift large objects. The puzzles themselves are diverse and require a careful eye, whether it is a floor with almost no friction, colored orbs that shoot a pattern of lightning, or considering a sheep's buoyance for holding down an underwater switch. While there is an overwhelming amount of items to find and collect through hidden areas and puzzles, Rocket is not required to gather everything to finish the experience.

Fortunately, the initial hump of difficulty is balanced with few time limits and unlimited lives. With smooth movement throughout, the physics game engine is impressive, considering aspects like Rocket's swinging momentum with his grapple hook to grab the next handle higher up. Each land has pleasant and diverse graphics and upbeat music to create this riveting adventure that entices the player to conquer the complexity of saving an amusement park.

Reflections: *Rocket: Robot on Wheels* was Sucker Punch Productions' first game, and its critical acclaim led them to work with Sony later to publish both the Sly and Infamous series. Sony acquired Sucker Punch in 2011. Their 2020 PlayStation 4/5 release, *Ghost of Tsushima*, was so well received that in 2021, a film adaptation was announced. Considering the quality seen in Rocket's gameplay and solid physics engine, it's no surprise the success the developer would see down the road. Now, if only I could use that insight to see where the last ticket is... – KY





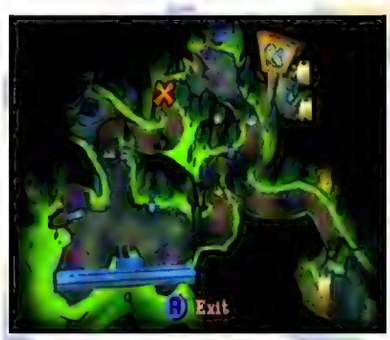
European Cartridge

Rugrats in Paris: The Movie

Genre: Action
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Avalanche Software
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

Tommy, Chuckie, Phil, Lil, Angelica, and Kimi are going to Euroreptarland in France! While retaining the movie's visual elements, this adventure does not follow the story, leaving it a hollow collection of mini-games. Players can control any of the toddlers and wander the strangely deserted park, visiting rides and playing games to win tickets to redeem for prizes, such as puzzle pieces, dolls, mugs, toys, and the Reptar Helmet (needed to complete the experience). Euroreptarland has five sections: the entrance, Ooey Gooey World, Reptar Island, Princess Theatre, and the Golf Park, all connected via monorail. Players walk through each in a third-person perspective, following signage and visiting attractions while collecting red tickets. Controls are basic but awkward, and instead of using a menu to see button layouts and park maps, the player has to walk to kiosks. Items from the Prize Center also activate symbols on the ground to open more content, like a frog that unlocks a fly-eating mini-game or a spyglass that shows artwork from the movie. The action is at the attractions. Whether games or rides, all are mini-games, such as a whack-a-mole clone, bumper cars, various shooting galleries, kung-fu dojo, skeeball, and golf, which is the most complex and complete of them, featuring multiple holes with diverse decorations. The controls differ but generally remain the same, with the Control Stick moving the character or aiming shots and the A button doing various actions like throwing items or making selections. Instructions appear at the start of each game explaining their rules, and the player may pause or quit at any time. If the player obtains enough gold tickets, they can pilot a giant Reptar robot in a pretend-play boss fight against Robosnail, Reptar's enemy, but this, too, plays like a mini-game. The main menu has difficulty settings, and there are multiplayer modes. However, they recycle the single-player games and usually require taking turns, which is not ideal for four people sitting around a console. Although *Rugrats* was a show about babies, it was not *for* babies. Even those still crawling around would be bored by this simplistic experience.

Reflections: When the first Rugrats movie came out in 1998, I hadn't watched the show in years but remembered it fondly enough to say I wanted to see it. My older brother made fun of me, saying I should read an *Entertainment Weekly* article about what to know before choosing to see movies. I felt embarrassed and never brought it up again. By the time the Paris sequel premiered, I no longer cared. But looking back, he never watched the cartoon, so why would he care? Recently, I watched both movies, and they are just fine, as they both represent the show well, unlike this interactive adaptation. – KN

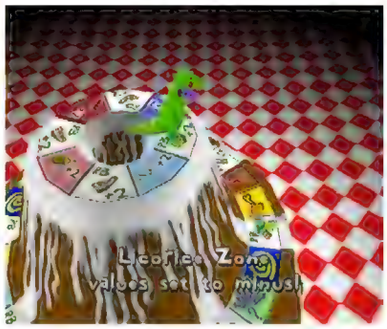


European Cartridge

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Rugrats: Scavenger Hunt

Rugrats: Treasure Hunt (EU)
Genre: Board Game
Release Date: June 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Realtime Associates
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4
Features: Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆



The Rugrats play board games their way by pretending they are on adventures! However, the results are inexplicably pedestrian. Three boards in 3D representation are available: an Aztec temple, a pirate ship, and Reptar's Candy Island, each in a fantasy setting inspired and bookended by domestic life, like Tommy's father's model ship or the twins fighting over a Reptar doll. Each 3D, third-person board has different goals, but all involve collecting items. In Temple of Gloom, the babies must cooperate to get the statue pieces before Angelica; in Pirate Treasure Hunt, players win by getting the most treasure, and in Reptar Rally, the goal is to hoard candy. Tommy, Chuckie, Phil, and Lil are in every game, so each baby is assigned a joypad or a CPU control, with the sharing of controllers permitted for multiplayer. Players take turns using a spinner to determine how many spaces they move. Squares have different effects, like searching the room for key items, buying toy cards (which can move characters on the board), opening secret passages, and more. Useful items can be found, such as cookies, which act as both currency and energy, and the compass, which allows the player to move in multiple directions. There are also keys that transport the character to different areas on Reptar's island. Non-playable characters like the antagonistic Angelica or helpful friends Spike and Grandpa are also on the boards. Babies need sleep, or Zzzz, which depletes with movement and can be replenished with cookies or Catnap squares. Getting tired temporarily removes the player from the game for a mandatory nap. The gameplay feels monotonous, with just one rock-paper-scissors-like mini-game used exclusively to break ties over squares. The environments are derivative and prone to clipping but have some charm, with the characters costumed for each board. With only the need to select menu items and move, the controls are simple and effective. Options for customization are meager, with only a setting for hidden squares, obscuring squares until characters have landed on them. It is all so uninspired that there is more appeal to napping in real life.

Reflections: Since my parent's house didn't have cable, watching Nickelodeon on cable TV at grandma's was always a treat, especially in the early '90s heyday of "Nicktoons." *Rugrats* was among those I enjoyed, although I wasn't obsessed with it. Klasky-Csupo's distinctive animation style was memorable, the babies' adventures were imaginative, and their parents' absurd, mundane adult middle-class lives were just as interesting. It lasted from 1991 to 2004, and although I outgrew it and stopped watching it a couple of years into its run, I always thought well of the show. Apparently, I'm not alone: it was rebooted in 2021 as a 3D-animated series. – KN

European Cartridge
Rugrats: Treasure Hunt

Rush 2: Extreme Racing USA

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Arcade-style racing action explodes onto the N64 in this energetic race through the United States. Sixteen cars and trucks are available. Each vehicle can be customized with different colors and stripes, rims, engine sounds, and even the sound of the horn. There is also an array of options for tweaking how the cars drive, choosing between a manual or automatic transmission, the torque level, the stiffness of the suspension (changing how drifting works and how the car's handling feels), and the type of tire and its firmness. In first- or third-person perspectives, players can cruise in Practice mode, take One Race through a single track, or take on a Circuit of 24 races with courses built from the pre-existing six-track layouts. Single races are straightforward: push to outrun and outmaneuver opponents and come in first place. Racing in Circuit mode, however, is a dual-objective affair. Players must finish in as good a position as possible for higher points and contend with the timer, passing checkpoints to gain additional time along the route. The proceedings greatly convey a feeling of speed while still providing a firm sense of driving control. The tracks span the USA, such as Alcatraz, New York Uptown, Hawaii, Los Angeles, and Seattle. These locations vary in their style of play. Las Vegas, for example, is a straightforward racing track with few shortcuts. Others are heavier on the exploration and stunt-racing side, with special stunt tracks such as Half Pipe and Crash. Scattered throughout the courses are collectible keys and Mountain Dew cans that, when collected, unlock secret cars on that track. Stunt mode puts the player on a collection of tracks designed around doing fancy aerial launches and rolls, driving up along walls, and generally defying the laws of physics. The vast array of available cars (plus six hidden ones unlockable per track) includes a Compact, Pickup, Sedan, and more, each with a unique body style. The hidden vehicles include gems like the Taxi, the Prototype, and the Mountain Dew Racer. Smooth arcade-style controls, colorful graphics, detailed environments, and a grooving soundtrack combine in a clever and fun title that should bring a lot of fast-paced enjoyment.

Reflections: I love a good, crazy racing game that defies the laws of physics in exciting ways. *Rush 2: Extreme Racing USA* builds on the original *San Francisco Rush*'s arcade-style enjoyment by balancing the racing and stunt elements. I had a blast just tooling around on the Stunt track, launching the 1970s equivalent of a minivan into the sky and spinning it in tremendous flips all the way down. It still doesn't quite measure up to the Cruis'n franchise for me, but it's undeniably a fun time in its own right. – CW

European Cartridge

S.C.A.R.S.

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Vivid Image
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

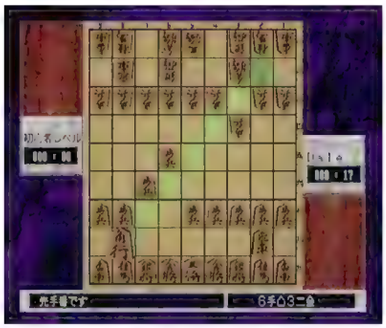
This weapons-based racing title has players battling it out in insect and animal-themed vehicles while jostling to be the first to cross the finish line. Driving over the plentiful munitions pick-ups on the track will collect them for limited use, including heat-seeking projectiles, magnets to slow down the opposition, and a hot-potato-like bomb that passes from car to car until it explodes! Perspective choices include two traditional third-person views (near and far) from behind and a first-person perspective directly in front of the vehicle. Nine detailed tracks with multiple routes and themes, such as a ski resort, a deserted island, and a mountain filled with UFOs, are available to race on, but only some are available at the onset. The other tracks are unlocked as the players progress through the three points-based Cup tournaments. Tracks can be raced on during the day, night, or dusk and also feature a rain/foggy weather option. Five cars are available at the start, with four more unlocked via a one-on-one challenge mode that commences after winning a Cup. Themed vehicles like the Tiger Shark and the Rhino Roadster resemble their namesakes. Each one controls differently, varying in speed, acceleration, grip, armor, and weapon attributes. Six vehicles compete during races (up to four potentially controlled by players via split-screen), but winning will depend on how racers utilize the various weapon pick-ups and which routes they decide to take. Taking the wrong (longer) way almost guarantees a drop in position since enemy cars are always close behind. The outrageous vehicle and track designs are a sight to behold, but taking them all in may be difficult due to the break-neck speed of the races. The audio, on the other hand, leaves a lot to be desired. The cars sound like weed whackers, and the music, although catchy, does not seem to fit the rest of the style. Also available are Mirror Mode, Time Attack (Ghost Mode), and Custom Cups, where players can mix and match tracks from other Cups. This racing combat experience should keep players slamming the pedal to the metal and keeping the trigger finger ready.

Reflections: Hitting hairpin turns and dodging numerous traps at breakneck speeds is an amazing feeling, especially while sitting comfortably in 1st place. Don't let the opponents in *S.C.A.R.S.* (Super Computer Animal Racing Simulator) fool you, though. No matter how far ahead of the pack you are, an opponent will always catch up to you right before the finish line. It's like the competition has a built-in warping system. The computer AI will only take the best possible route to the finish line, which will also cause a few headaches, especially when racing on a course for the first time. This poses a problem by making memorization a necessity to win. Even with those minute issues, this is still a great racing game! – MV

European Cartridge

Saikyō Habu Shōgi

[Strongest Habu Shōgi]
Genre: Board Game
Release Date: June 1996
Region: JP
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆



Japanese shōgi sensation Yoshiharu Habu provides his likeness and guidance in this two-player board game variant of chess. The implementation of Habu-san is most prominent in the Beginner Classroom tutorial, where he teaches the ins and outs of shōgi. The match is viewed by an overhead 2D camera above the board, with the option of the C-buttons to angle the view slightly. Each player lays out three rows of pieces for setup with international chess pieces such as pawns, bishops, and knights in addition to specialty shōgi pieces like lances, gold generals, and silver generals. Each piece has unique movement limitations around the board. Shōgi also adds the ability to promote and drop pieces. Promotion occurs when a qualifying piece from the player makes it to the opposing end's three rows of the board. They are then promoted and capable of moving extra spaces than before. When an adversary's piece lies in the player's area of movement, that rival piece can be removed from the board and "captured" by the player. Captured pieces can be dropped nearly anywhere on the board, under the player's control. Victory occurs when an opponent's king is placed in checkmate, which is when the king is unable to move into a place on the board where they cannot be captured. Promoting, dropping, and capturing pieces opens up endless amounts of strategy, which can be learned in Habu-san's tutorial and practiced in the Shōgi Game Room mode that sets up a standard one or two-player match. 10-Second Shōgi enables a ten-second time limit on each player's move, and Reverse Shōgi initiates reverse positioning on the board. Student Competition is the primary single-player mode where the player competes against 18 progressively tougher opponents. The drab graphical presentation will not impress, and the only notable audio element is voiceovers announcing each player's movements. If the barebones presentation can be tolerated, then there are a multitude of viable shōgi options and modes to be happily consumed.

Reflections: *Saikyō Habu Shōgi* has the distinction of being the first third-party N64 game and also the first N64 title to make use of the Controller Pak memory peripheral. It is better known for the dubious honor of being the Nintendo 64 launch title in Japan everyone avoided because *Super Mario 64* and *Pilotwings 64* were the competing options. Only one out of every 100 N64 launch owners actually purchased *Saikyō Habu*. Although those who did received a decent (if underwhelming) digital rendition of shōgi. – DK

San Francisco Rush 2049

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Midway Games West
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Advanced race cars tear through the streets of San Francisco in the far future of 2049. In this third- or first-person arcade racing title, choose from six initial cars, customize their appearance, engine, handling, and transmission, and then zoom into a race. Races are either run individually or as a Circuit of multiple tracks. Each track winds its way through a shining future version of the city by the bay, with hints of present-day geography to keep the flavor. With the city's prominent hills highlighted in many courses, an additional feature comes to already sleek future cars: wings. Holding the Z button while airborne extends the car's wings for angling and gliding, allowing access to hidden locations and a faster, safer landing. The enemy AI is pretty unforgiving, as arcade racers go. While there is plenty of fun driving with the cars as-is, customizing them by swapping tires, transmissions, or engines can mean the difference between third place and first. This frustration is alleviated by the fact that the only lap checkpoint is the start/finish line, and the track design allows a great deal of exploration to find shortcuts and collect the hidden coins in each area. There are seven unlockable cars, an array of hidden tracks, and additional circuits to find. Players unlock these in several ways: collecting coins, accumulating points in Stunt Mode, scoring kills in Battle Mode, or placing highly in a Circuit race. Stunt Mode allows the player to launch around a massive stadium-like course covered in ramps, tunnels, and corridors. The objective is to perform a string of impressive acrobatics without destroying the vehicle in the process. Aerial somersaults and corkscrew maneuvers using the wings feel amazing, owing to the game's tight and smooth controls. Battle Mode pits up to four players against each other in large multi-tiered battle arenas, armed with weapon pickups like the Gatling Gun, Grenade Launcher, or the powerful Sonic Blaster that can destroy an enemy car at close range in a single hit. It is graphically stunning for an arcade racer, with gorgeous, well-defined structures, minimal fog, bright colors, and exciting car designs.

The soundtrack's driving techno beat matches the intensity of the gameplay, helping to set the futuristic mood. With fast-paced racing action players can pick up and play, robust customization options, and exciting tracks with multiple and secret paths, fans of arcade-style racing on the N64 should definitely get behind the futuristic wheel of this one!

Reflections: The Rush series is my go-to for arcade racing. *Rush 2049* gives me a feel of what a futuristic, cyberpunk city might be like if it weren't an absolute dystopian hellscape or an alien planet. It's the only futuristic racer I can think of whose cars aren't hover-mobiles in the vein of *F-Zero*. I only wish I were better at the game. That AI can be brutal. The arcade release of *Rush 2049* was the last one to have the heralded "Atari Games" label, which dates back to 1984. Before that, Atari Games was the original Atari, Inc. – CW

European Cartridge

San Francisco Rush: Extreme Racing

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Password Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

San Francisco's streets have never been so fast and furious as in this home conversion of the arcade racing game. Choose one of eight cars, pick a transmission type, and zoom off in practice mode, single races through one of six tracks, or a circuit of 24 races with courses built from the pre-existing six-track layouts. Racing is a dual-objective affair: Players must finish in as good a position as possible for higher points, contend with the timer, and reach the next checkpoint to gain additional time. The available cars range from a simple, boxy sedan to flame-covered muscle cars to what is intended to resemble a Volkswagen Microbus, and players can choose from various colors to customize their ride. Each car handles slightly differently. Each car can be driven in either automatic or manual transmission mode, adding a tradeoff between easier driving (automatic) or faster acceleration (manual). The game also offers an array of options for tweaking the gameplay, such as difficulty, number of computer opponents, wind that affects the difficulty of landing the car after a jump, or turning off respawning cars – in other words, if someone crashes, they die. After some practice, players will quickly get the hang of taking sharp turns and landing their car after launching into the air up one of the city's infamous hills. They'll need that tight control, though, as the car will take physical damage if crashed into civilian cars, buildings, or other obstacles, and if hit hard enough, the car will explode, costing valuable time. If skilled enough, players can find shortcuts through the city map, giving them a much-needed advantage against opponents. Collecting a series of keys on each track unlocks that track's bonus car. The graphics and framerate are smooth, offering a visually appealing San Francisco, tracing paths around and through locations like the Golden Gate Bridge, Chinatown, and Haight-Ashbury. The soundtrack, unfortunately, doesn't quite live up to the gameplay or graphics and is eminently forgettable. Fans of arcade-style racers or those who have always wanted to burn rubber around San Francisco's famous landmarks would do well to check this one out.

Reflections: The N64 is known for being positively swimming in racing games. *San Francisco Rush* is a solid, competently built entry and a well-done port of its arcade counterpart. The Rush games share some DNA with the Cruis'n game series and are as fun to pick up and play on the N64 as they were to drop a few quarters into at the local mall arcade. The selection of cars is neat, as is the fact that they play and handle differently and the fact that they take some visible damage (if you, like me, are prone to wrecking them into walls or other cars). This is a decent racer for sure, but definitely not the best the system has to offer. – CW

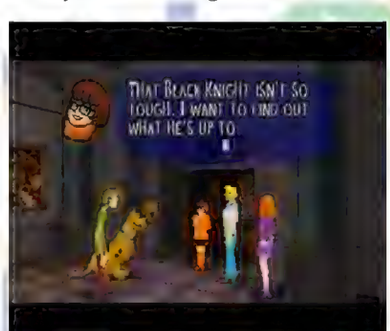
European Cartridge

Scooby-Doo! Classic Creep Capers

Genre: Adventure
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Dev.: TerraGlyph Interactive Studios
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Join the gang from Mystery, Inc. as they hunt for clues and solve the mystery behind the Ghoul King and his cohort's series of crimes. Control Shaggy as he runs through trap-filled 3D environments with canine Scooby at his side. Camera perspectives are stationary but switch depending on location, offering a variety of dramatic angles as the gang explores the museum, a snowy resort, a jungle island, and a dark and creepy castle. In each of the four episodes, Shaggy and Scooby start by searching for clues surrounding a local mystery perpetuated by a masked villain. Poke through each area thoroughly, opening crates, unlocking doors, and picking up anything that looks out of place, all with a quick tap of the A button. If Shaggy bumps into something scary (i.e., almost anything that moves), his courage meter will drop. If it empties, he'll make a run for it, sending the player back a few doors. Grab scattered Scooby Snacks to keep his courage topped up. After stumbling through wacky and unexpected traps, they will eventually encounter the episode's roaming baddie, kicking off a chase-based mini-game. The goal in each episode is to collect all of the items and give them to Fred, Daphne, and Velma. They'll use them to solve the mystery, then devise a trap out of the leftovers. Lure the villain into the trap, then unmask the fiend to see who's behind the crime. Gameplay mostly sticks to item hunting and chase sequences, though there are a few puzzles to solve and a sandwich-making mini-game to indulge in. Unfortunately, most of the challenge comes from sudden and frequent camera angle shifts that can disorient the player, turning every room into a maze. They also play havoc on the ability to move Shaggy in a consistent direction, which is a real pain when a villain is right behind. Where the experience shines is its artwork, music, and voice acting, all of which have as much personality as the cartoon. There isn't much in the way of challenge or intrigue, making this a one-note adventure best reserved for existing Scooby fans.

Reflections: *Scooby-Doo! Classic Creep Capers* reimagines three TV episodes as playable adventures, then conjures a unique scenario for its final chapter. The idea of playing your cartoons instead of watching them lends a certain amount of fun, provided you enjoy the cheesy and repetitive gags *Scooby-Doo* is famous for having. The gameplay is frightfully thin, though, and I'll admit to zoning out during many scenes, as the adventure portions are basically fetch quests. It's worth noting that this shares its title with a 2001 Game Boy Color release, though the two games have nothing in common beyond branding. – JBa



European Cartridge

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

SD Hiryū no Ken Densetsu

[SD Legend of the Fist of the Flying Dragon]
Genre: Fighting, RPG
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Culture Brain
Publisher: Culture Brain
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low (Tournament), High (Story)
☆☆☆☆

Crack those knuckles and prepare for a 3D polygonal side-view brawl as martial artist Ryuhi and a colorful cast punch, kick, and throw their opponents for glory. The graphics are bright, the music is brighter, and personality abounds in each timed, round-based, one-on-one match. Every character is easily mastered, relying on simple combos and easy-to-execute special moves. Ryuhi fits the standard martial artist slot with quick strikes (via a string of A-button kicks or B-button punches) and the legendary Hiryū no Ken spinning kick to flatten foes. Min Min fills the role of a combo juggler, being a deadly beauty in the right hands. Oddballs like Robo no Hana – a beefy robotic sumo wrestler that slaps and slams his way to victory, and Bokuchin – a Jiangshi (Chinese vampire) that hops around and hurls himself forward in a spinning headbutt, round out the roster nicely. There are 54 total playable characters, but only 17 are unique, meaning many reskinned clones. Still, it feels great to create combos from the friendly controls, such as hitting an opponent with an uppercut and keeping them airborne by mashing the B button. But take caution as blocking or dodging around the 3D space becomes unnecessary with the braindead CPU players, meaning a second player is a must when testing a fighter's mettle. The story mode exclusively stars Ryuhi as he seeks to become the greatest and get revenge against the man who killed his master while winning a martial arts tournament. During the tournament or story modes, fighters earn items that enhance different stats (attack, defense, etc.). Some saved items from the Japanese release of *Hiryū no Ken Twin* (*Flying Dragon*) can even be transferred over. When selecting a warrior, there is an option to add items in three available slots to create more customized fighters, particularly Treasure Busters (selectable special moves). Each character has a standard Buster move set (special moves via C-down and D-pad) and a Secret Buster (C-left with at least one special bar charged up). C-up and C-right grant Treasure Busters when items are equipped, allowing for useful new moves, including ones that cause status effects such as burns and poison. Opportunities for massive damage present themselves via the Mind's Eye, a game-optional mechanic that provides critical hit chances by striking opponents in the correct spot. The frantic action is best experienced with a friend, so grab a partner and show off some gnarly moves together!

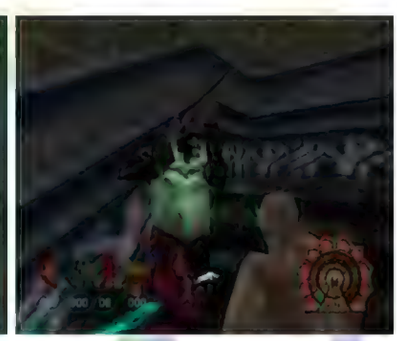
Reflections: Longtime fans of the Flying Dragon franchise are in for a treat with a full 3D recreation of the story mode from the Famicom/NES title, *Flying Dragon: The Secret Scroll*. Sadly, only Japanese players would enjoy this acclaimed improvement over *Flying Dragon* on the N64, as US and European players wouldn't receive the sequel/improved re-release. It's a shame to think this was the last of the Hiryū no Ken games save for a pair of Game Boy Color titles. Thankfully, what's here is more than enough to keep fans busy for ages. – CPr

Shadow Man

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios Teesside
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

In this immensely dark third-person comic book-based title, players take control of Michael LeRoi, a newly appointed Shadow Man (Voodoo Warrior) who must protect Liveside (the world of the living) from Deadside (the world of the dead). An evil entity from Deadside called Legion is putting together a team of serial killers from Liveside to help create an evil army to bring forth the apocalypse. To stop them, Michael must warp between the two worlds using his dead brother's teddy bear, which acts as a link between the realms. Deadside is a dreary and disgusting world filled with magically sealed doors, lava pits, and grotesque monsters, such as acidic gargoyles and skinless dogs. Players must traverse this enormous realm by hopping across platforms, swimming through pools of muck, and shimmying along ledges, all while searching for Dark Souls to increase Michael's Shadow Power. As Shadow Power rises, Michael can use context-sensitive actions that unlock various sealed doors to enter new areas. He must also seek out prophecy items that allow him to touch and traverse fiery obstacles that get in his way. Liveside and Deadside teem with vicious enemies, but Michael can protect himself with dual-wielded weapons that differ depending on which world he is in currently. While in Liveside, Michael wields traditional weapons like handguns, shotguns, and SMGs. Deadside weapons are more magical and flame-based, including the Asson, a skull that shoots fireballs, or the Marteau, a jawbone that sends out shockwaves that terminate with fiery tendrils. Maneuvering Michael is a breeze, thanks to simple yet responsive controls. Notably, the auto lock-on when firing upon enemies keeps combat from getting frustrating. Fantastic voice acting and moody music round out the presentation nicely. The dark atmosphere and interesting (sometimes hilarious) NPCs do well to keep players hooked. That extra push is needed, as the plentiful twists and turns in Deadside make it challenging to navigate, even for players lucky enough to have the original pack-in paper map (which is so complex it resembles a plate of old spaghetti). It is easy to feel turned around and confused, but determined players will love getting lost in this adventure.

Reflections: Fans of the *Shadow Man* comic have been treated to some amazing video gaming content. Just a few short years after the original *Shadow Man*, *Shadow Man: 2econd Coming* was released on the PlayStation 2. In 2013, the original *Shadow Man* was then re-released for Windows and OS X. In 2021, the team that developed the re-release, Nightdive Studios, published *Shadow Man Remastered* on modern platforms, featuring updated graphics and content that was cut from the original game. – MV



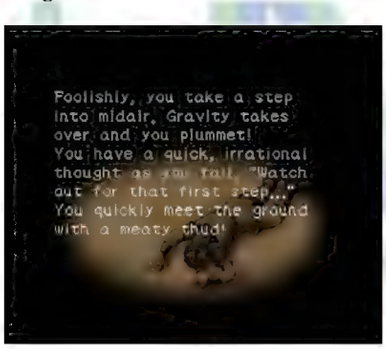
European Cartridge

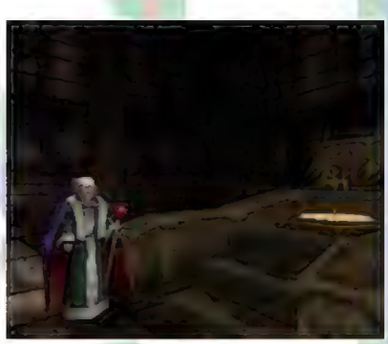
Shadowgate 64: Trials of the Four Towers

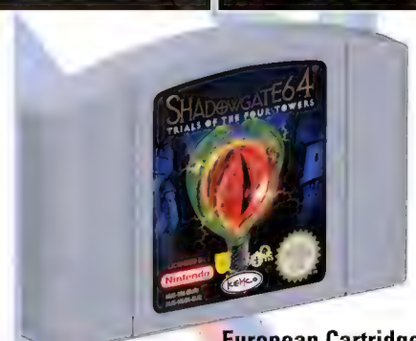
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: June 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: TNS, Infinite Ventures
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

In this sequel to *Shadowgate*, the halfling Del is imprisoned in the depths of Castle Shadowgate. Throughout this first-person 3D adventure, Del uncovers secrets, runs into ancient figures, and attempts to save the world. While the quest begins with only a tiny room to navigate, over time, more and more become accessible. Del can collect various items scattered throughout the four towers and their surrounding buildings, with a multitude of chambers and underground passages. Some are useful for what they allow him to do, such as keys to open locks or a lever for a broken mechanism, while others can be useful for their information (i.e., books and manuscripts that contain clues). The knowledge acquired is vital in determining which items may be red herring objects that either do nothing or that Del can misuse in place of another object. There are also hazards for him to worry about, like long falls or deep water, and dangerous situations, like a nearby angry dungeon keeper, that can end his quest. Fortunately, Del can save his progress at any point and load it from the main menu. This adventure is a nice change from worrying about enemies, boss fights, and other stressful events. Del can progress at any pace, except on a few occasions with time-constrained actions (such as a maze in the Tower of Trials that he must complete before a candle burns out). The look of the people and locations is relatively dark and drab, fitting the story. The proceedings have atmospheric music and sounds like doors opening to different creaks and walking surfaces changing the sound of footsteps, which is great attention to detail. Unfortunately, several elements of gameplay feel incomplete. For example, crouching is never required; presumably, it is only available for better ground searching. Despite that, this is a fantastical experience for all who enter Castle Shadowgate, from those learning of the legends for the first time to past adventurers relieved not to have to collect torches again.

Reflections: The original black-and-white *Shadowgate* appeared first on the Apple Macintosh in 1987. It was one of the four MacVenture point-and-click titles, along with *Déjà Vu* (1985), *Uninvited* (1986), and *Deja Vu II: Lost in Las Vegas* (1988). The Shadowgate series stands out as console games, being unique adventure genre entries on the NES (also ported to Game Boy Color) and TurboGrafx CD before landing on the N64. I think *Shadowgate 64* is surprisingly well done for the series' attempt at 3D! One of my favorite parts is how the flavor text varies with the dozens of books you can pick up, even poking fun at times ("Maybe I should open a library"). Sadly, I didn't appreciate all the extra, unnecessary items that the completionist in me felt forced to collect. It's just more junk for me to try using when I get stuck. While this experience won't appeal to everyone, adventure fans will rejoice. – KY







European Cartridge

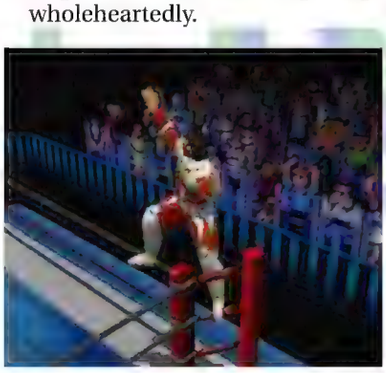
Japanese Cartridge

Shin Nippon Pro Wrestling: Tōhkon Road – Brave Spirits

[New Japan Pro Wrestling: Tōhkon Road – Brave Spirits]
Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Jan. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Yuke's
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆

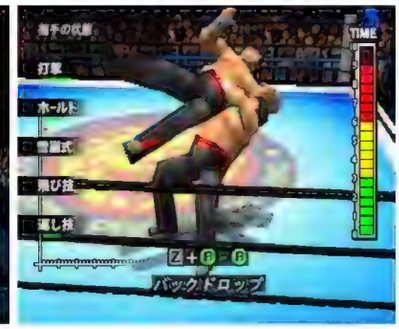
The competitors of New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW) are primed to showcase their brand of hard-hitting action. The 3D gameplay transpires from an overhead angled-down of the squared circle. There are no traditional health meters on screen, but wrestlers still accumulate damage with every move and blow exchanged. The more hits they absorb, the longer it takes them to regain their footing after a knockdown, creating an opening for a pin or submission victory attempt. The A and B buttons handle varying powers of strikes, while combining the Z button with A or B attempts one of several slams or holds for each wrestler. This control mechanic applies to nearly any position of gameplay, be it bodyslams and attacks from the standing-ready position, like Kensuke Sasaki's piledriver, or stomps and leglock submissions when attacking a downed opponent, such as Manabu Nakanishi's cross armbar. As each move is executed, the button sequence and name of the move is displayed at the bottom of the screen, which assists in memorizing each character's unique move list. While it is certainly a functional control scheme, it will require heavy practice to master timing offensive attacks, as the computer can be too aggressive to overcome on the default difficulty setting. The roster consists of 16 grapplers from NJPW, including mainstays such as Jyushin Thunder Liger, Tiger Mask, and The Great Muta. Three of them need to be unlocked by racking up wins in Title Road mode, where players compete in several straight singles or tag team matches to win the championship belt in their respective divisions. Exhibition mode offers choices for one to four players to compete in Singles, Tag Team, and Battle Royal matches. All three match types require pins or submissions to win, but in Battle Royal, all three adversaries have to be pinned or submitted, so there is one left standing victorious in the four-player free-for-all. While the moves are animated splendidly, the graphics suffer from muddy character models and a noticeably chugging frame rate when playing with four wrestlers. This is a decent wrestling experience in general, but some rough edges make it difficult to recommend wholeheartedly.

Reflections: The serious sports-like representation of Japanese wrestling is respectfully demonstrated here with voiced-over ring introductions for every fighter and audible calls from the ref lambasting wrestlers to release illegal holds and to keep the action in the ring. I was delighted to see The Great Muta's trademark "Green Mist" attack get the 64-bit treatment. Developer Yuke's is best known in North America for its countless WWF/WWE games across many platforms. However, North America never saw releases of the team's two N64 wrestling games, as *Brave Spirits* and its sequel remained exclusive to Japan. – DK



Shin Nippon Pro Wrestling: Tōhkon Road 2 – The Next Generation

[New Japan Pro Wrestling: Tōhkon Road 2 – The Next Generation]
Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Yuke's
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

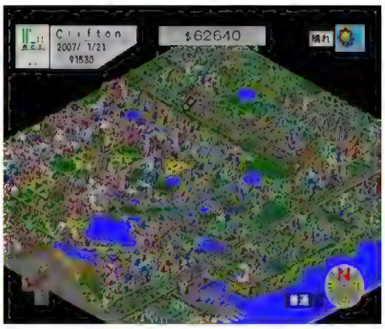


Twenty-six stars from New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW) mean business in this vastly improved follow-up to *Shin Nippon Pro Wrestling: Tōhkon Road – Brave Spirits*. In-ring 3D combat transpires from a perspective, looking down onto the front of the ring. Wear down opponents with strikes like punches and dropkicks using the A and B buttons, or hold the Z button and use A or B to attempt grapple moves or submissions, such as Tatsumi Fujinami's butterfly suplex. These attacks prep opponents for a finishing blow that can be performed after taunting a dazed foe and then hitting a specific button sequence. For example, Antonio Inoki's signature Abdominal Stretch is executed by holding the Z button and double-tapping the A button behind a groggy grappler. The inputs for all moves display on the bottom of the screen for convenient reference, though, perplexingly, they cannot be disabled. A training mode is available and allows players to practice with each wrestler. The two headlining modes are Championship and MVP. Championship mode has the player picking any wrestler or tag team and attempting to win six matches to qualify for a title match. MVP mode has a wrestler compete in a year's worth of NJPW programming. The player's selected wrestler will compete in match-ups each week, and their win-loss records, faction alignment, injuries, and title reign status will be recorded all year. Wrestler Shuffle is a fascinating customization feature that has wrestlers swapping move lists with each other. Exhibition mode features up to four players fighting for pin or submission victories in Singles, Tag Team, and Battle Royal action or setting up an eight-slot bracket tournament. Complimenting the excellent gameplay, quality graphics/animation, and match variety is an all-star presentation with dazzling entrances filled with pyro, laser lights, and emotional crowning ceremonies when winning championship titles. The only things holding this back from being a true mat classic are a near-intolerable slowdown in matches involving four wrestlers and the AI's nasty habit of occasionally reversing a majority of attempted moves on the default difficulty. Despite those faults, this Japanese wrestling simulation is a tremendous representation of the sport.

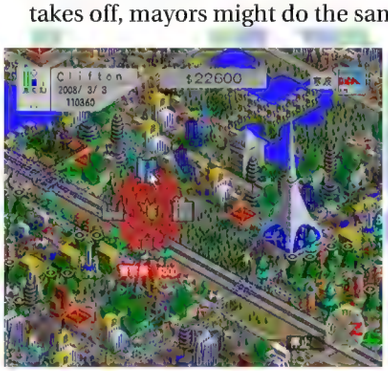
Reflections: *Tōhkon Road 2* was released less than a year after the first *Tōhkon Road*. The amount of upgrades this sequel received in such a short period of time is staggering. Highlights include refined graphical fidelity for wrestlers and arenas, noticeably smoother gameplay, an exponentially enhanced presentation, and the time-sink game mode that is MVP. I am a huge fan of the pomp and circumstance of the wrestler entrances and had a few of the catchy entrance themes stuck in my head. There is now a ref in the ring at all times, but despite my best efforts, I could never collide with him when his calls were not going my way! – DK

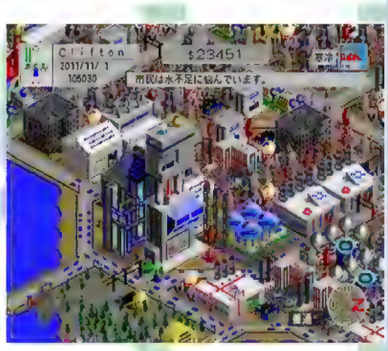
SimCity 2000

Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Jan. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Maxis Software
Ported by: Genki
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆



The world is a canvas, so let's get building! This point-and-click city manager has players try to convert an empty plot of land into a successful city through tactful zoning, budgeting, and disaster management. The gameplay is presented in a lower-than-isometric perspective, giving the landscape and height variations a sense of scale and sharp edges while giving cities an expansive feel. After starting, a short cutscene explains the colonization, then loads the Terrain Editor. The landscape, including the topography, forests, and waterways, can be customized here. The player then selects from three difficulties to determine starting funds and enter their own and city names. Once play begins, a well-designed radial menu of icons allows players to select their desired building tools. However, the cursor and camera movement are not particularly smooth on the map once it is time to start placing zones and structures. The menu can also be used to view charts and graphs that provide mayors with helpful information, toggle layer visibilities on the map, cause disasters, deploy first responders, save and load the city, play mini-games, and adjust options. The user interface also shows demand for zone types, the date, funds available, weather, and alert messages. An overarching plot also features – establishing a colony before escaping into orbit. A newscaster occasionally delivers headlines, providing story beats and highlighting milestones. As the town grows, the launch occurs, and a second chapter starts, triggering a reskin of the city into colorful, curved sci-fi structures. Numerous mini-games are also available – mayors can bet the city's funds at the horse track, breed creatures to defend from monster disasters, or kill time with a sci-fi shooting gallery, plant-growing laboratory, and engage in a dating sim. The latter three mini-games have no material impact on the city and are shallow diversions. A patient sort of fun emerges from play over time, but it requires fighting through sluggish cursor movement and compressed audiovisual assets. Replay value is also impaired without scenarios – when the colony takes off, mayors might do the same.





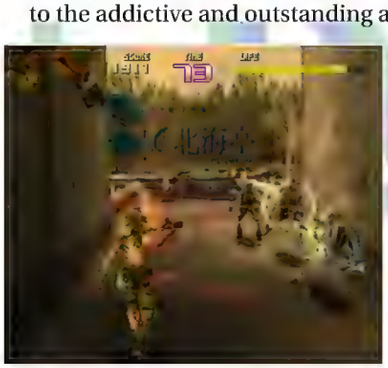
Reflections: *SimCity 2000* is not a game you would expect a major deviation from in a port, given how beloved the source material is, but the devs at Doda (purchased by Genki) certainly got creative. Being able to defend against giant monster attacks is brilliant. Mapping D-pad directions to building choices for quick use is handy for infrastructure. Sadly, the Control Stick is a poor stand-in for a mouse. The famous dimetric projection is fine... until buildings become unrecognizable; the Chapter 2 sprites vary in quality. Even familiar tunes and voice-overs use weirdly poor samples. It's a passable edition that might scratch the creative itch, but to truly appreciate *SimCity 2000*, head for a computer. – DG

Sin and Punishment: Hoshi no Keishōsha

[Sin and Punishment: The Successor of Earth]
Genre: Rail Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Treasure, Nintendo R&D1
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆☆

In future dystopian Japan (2007!), teenagers Saki and Airan must defeat the food source-turned-monster Ruffians while also battling the Armed Volunteers military group. This swift third-person rail shooter has the player using an unlimited, rapid-fire blaster to take down soldiers, drones, vehicles, and monster varieties in stages with timed sections. Saki/Airan can roll/dodge and double jump to avoid incoming attacks and move left or right to traverse obstacles and pitfalls as they automatically move forward in certain areas. Independent aiming via a target reticule is accomplished with the Control Stick, while a button toggles between lock-on targeting or manual aiming with a more powerful shot. The constant enemy waves often get too close for comfort, but nasty creatures and army minions can be dealt with by a swipe of the gun's attached energy sword with a tap of the Z button. This attack can be used defensively to deflect some incoming projectile weapons (energy bolts, missiles, etc.), which can often be redirected back toward enemies. This counterattack is especially useful (and often necessary) during the inventive but sometimes straining boss battles. To keep fighting, the player must clear stage areas before losing all their health. Damage occurs from enemy attacks, but any remaining health drains quickly when the level timer runs down. Time and scarce health orbs appear during stages and by defeating certain enemies. Bonus point orbs can contribute to adding to the bank of continues, which will likely be needed. The graphic detail is solid, and the smooth gameplay is a delight, especially since so many enemies and blasts/explosions fill the screen. An energetic rock soundtrack complements the proceedings. The gameplay/camera perspective refreshingly switches between stage areas from directly behind the player moving forward to the player moving horizontally or off-angle; a highlight example is a riveting stage at sea where Airan fights from a flying platform while battling aircraft carriers, jets, helicopters, and speedboats. Cinematic cutscenes with adorable English voice acting convey the convoluted sci-fi plot, but they can be skipped to return to the addictive and outstanding arcade action.

Reflections: *Sin and Punishment* was a hit in Japan. It was even reviewed by mainstream U.S. gaming websites, likely leading to the game being imported at the time. A novelization and magazine comic adaptation were released in Japan, and Saki would eventually show up as an assist trophy in Super Smash Bros. games for the Wii, 3DS, and Wii U. Following full localization, this title was re-released in North America on Wii's Virtual Console in 2007 and then followed up with *Sin and Punishment: Star Successor* in 2009. Although technically listed as a two-player game, be forewarned: here, that consists of one player controller moving the character while the second one aims and shoots. – PC

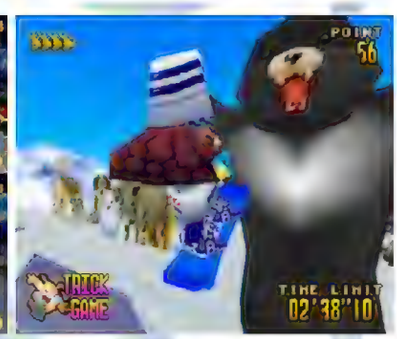


Snowboard Kids

Genre: Sports, Racing
Release Date: Mar. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Racdym
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Choose from one of five colorful characters, like Slash, Nancy, or Jam, each with individual speed, turning, and tricks stats, then race to the finish in this charming 3D snowboarding title. There are nine scenic courses to run through (three of which have to be unlocked) that vary in length, difficulty, number of laps, and hidden shortcuts. A Time Attack and three mini-modes (Trick Game, Shot Game, and Speed Game) are available. Battle Race, where four racers compete for first place, is the primary mode and the only one that offers multiplayer. The gameplay is simple, easy to understand, and feels incredibly smooth. Downhill momentum carries racers; push and pull the Control Stick left, right, and back to make turns and manage speed. Every course also has jumps where the player can flick the stick and press the C-buttons to perform spins and grabs. Successfully landing those tricks will earn the player coins. Coins scattered throughout the courses must be collected to run through item boxes to purchase them. With enough, they will award weapons and power-ups to use to the player's advantage. For example, the Speed Fan will boost speed, a mouse steals coins from others, and bombs and the Freeze Shot are offensive weapons. However, item boxes become hazardous if enough coins are not saved up to purchase. Ski-lifts at the bottom of the courses take snowboarders back to the top to begin the next lap and can lead to chaotic pileups at the gate if things are close since it can only take one racer at a time. Finishing races third or higher lets the player pocket any coins not spent on items and grants a rank bonus that can all be put toward buying better boards. Be warned: later courses will seriously challenge the ability to make tight turns, and AI opponents can be relentless to the point of frustration. That said, neither of those points prevents this from being an exceptionally enjoyable snowboarding experience.

Reflections: I first played *Snowboard Kids* years ago but only remembered some details. I was happy to find out that it is still enjoyable as a solid kart-style racer but with snowboards. To me, the cartoony art style was really charming. It resulted in some pretty distinct and memorable character designs and courses, especially since Racdym didn't restrict themselves to snowy mountain settings for all of the stages (sometimes even ditching snow altogether). The music was also comforting to listen to; it sounded like snow days and hot chocolate to me in a way that only an N64 game and the late '90s could. I ended up with a surprising amount of nostalgia for a title I barely remembered. Quicksand Valley can kick rocks, though. – NT



European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Snowboard Kids 2

Genre: Sports, Racing
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL (AUS)
Developer: Racdym
Publisher: Atlus
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Slash, Nancy, and the rest of the kids are back for another day on the slopes in this downhill snowboarding sequel. The original five characters return from the first entry, joined by four new additions, three of which have to be unlocked. Characters have their distinct personality, look, and "type," which determines their general skill category – all-around, speed, or trick (control). Compete in third-person over-the-shoulder races of up to four players across 11 themed courses (jungle, island, space, and, of course, snowy mountains), along with four alternate course versions that change the time of day. Do this in Battle mode with friends, or shred alone in the single-player Story. In Story mode, progress by racing against AI snowboarders, playing mini-games (Speed, Trick, Shot), and occasionally facing boss challenges that involve everything from out-racing a baddie to damaging it with bombs. During stages, dash down the slope, pushing and pulling the Control Stick to turn and manage momentum while avoiding obstacles and collecting coins. Players use those coins to run through item boxes and purchase weapons and power-ups to help get ahead (wings for a higher jump, a pan to smack other players, etc.). Players can also jump and flick the analog stick or press the C-buttons to perform tricks that reward extra cash. A ski lift at the bottom of the hill then takes racers back to the top to begin the next lap. Only one racer is transported at a time, so chaotic pile-ups and strategic blocks at the gate are key. Between races in the town hub, players can paint and buy new boards, search for tips, listen to music on an in-game computer, swap characters at the school, and even interact with the town's inhabitants. The experience looks and plays great, with a solid selection of courses, interesting and varied characters, and chaotic yet fun multiplayer action. The AI lands on the ruthless side of things, especially in later races, which makes solo play a bit cumbersome, especially if players want to unlock all of the extras. Still, this is terrific snowboarding fun to sink hours into on a snowy day.

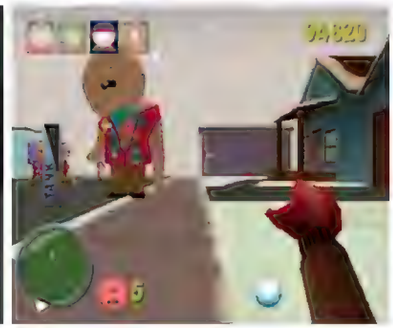
Reflections: I walked away from the first *Snowboard Kids* liking it a lot. It was a charming kart racer but with snowboards. *Snowboard Kids 2* is just as good, but with extras. Like the first, course designs in the sequel are not limited to snowy mountainsides (whew). As a nice touch, the characters each have outfits to match the scenery. My favorite was them all having their own Halloween costumes for the haunted house course. At one point in the story mode, you even race a stupidly fast dinosaur that lays eggs everywhere. That entire scenario was so absurd I couldn't help but love it, even if it did take multiple tries to beat. – NT

Australian Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

South Park

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆



Thanks to an evil comet, South Park is under attack, and Cartman, Stan, Kyle, and Kenny must save their town! This 3D first-person shooter imitates the construction paper look of the TV show, featuring the same locations, characters, and immature sense of humor. Five episodes are broken into levels, with Chef explaining objectives for each in-between. In most levels, simply blast enemies and follow arrow signs to the end, usually needing to clear an area of enemies to unlock doors to progress. There are two optional control schemes, both of which use the Control Stick and C-buttons for movement, direction, and aiming. Instead of guns, the kids throw infinite snowballs and pick up unique "gadgets," such as dodgeballs that ricochet, dart guns, explosive Terrance and Philip dolls, and more. Most weapons have an alternate mode, such as *yellow* snowballs that are slower but do extra damage. Health is represented by "mood." When depleted, the character gets angry and quits, costing one of five credits. Power-ups like Cheesy Poofs restore health, while others have temporary effects: Zip Cola increases speed, Mr. Hankey shields players, and Beefcake grants invincibility. Each episode has a principal enemy type, such as turkeys, evil clones, or toys, which makes combat repetitive. Their attack patterns are also similar, with some enemies that rush in herds, like the turkeys and cows, and others that fire projectiles, like the aliens and toys. Larger "tank" enemies with more health can spawn smaller minions. They can also attack the town, and it is up to the players to defeat them before they do. Bosses are often gargantuan versions of the episode's foes (a giant turkey, giant clone, giant toy), all with patterns and hidden weak points to find. Reaching these bosses is a slog, as most environments feel empty, and the repetitive fights and music don't help. At least multiplayer mode can be fun since up to four players can compete on several maps with unlockable characters. Plus, using an Expansion Pak enables widescreen support, a rare feature at the time. Sadly, this shooter is so tiring that even the boys seem slightly annoyed by the end.

Reflections: I grew up in rural America, where cable television wasn't available. We were close enough to the northern border that we could watch Canadian TV via antenna, however, letting us see unedited movies on CityTV and American cable shows on Global, which had *South Park*. Like most teens, my sister and I loved it. *South Park* remains popular today, but the excitement following its debut was enormous. Of course, this excitement prompted merchandise releases and hastily produced video games like this one. *South Park*'s creators would actually denounce this game just two years later. Even more bizarrely, the N64 version was poorly ported to PC and PlayStation, making this the "good" version. – KN

European Cartridge

South Park Rally

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Tantalus Interactive
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

Join *South Park* stars Stan, Kyle, Cartman, Kenny, and many other citizens while racing soapbox-style in cartoonish renderings of realistic vehicles through a year's worth of events structured around local and national holidays, including Rally Days, Spring Cleaning, and Thanksgiving. This third-person kart-style racer, featuring 3D representations of the paper cutout style of the cartoon, has three modes of play: Championship, Arcade Race, and Multiplayer. Championship is a series of 14 races across seven maps where first place is required to move on. Failing to do so means using a coin found within the levels to try again. Controls are loose, and interactions with other drivers or hazards can send the vehicle flying across the screen completely off the intended route or butted up against a wall in the wrong direction. The maps, which take place in familiar locations like the town or Big Gay Al's place, are fairly open, with some lacking a roadway entirely. The goal of each track is not simply driving laps. Objectives range from the standard racing checkpoints to things like collecting Halloween candy or shooting all the opponents with Cupid's bow and arrow. Spread around the map are colored boxes with sets of randomized objects that can be used against other drivers. For example, blue boxes can have Sparky the Dog, who completely stops an opponent, while a yellow box might give Barf, which creates a pool of goo that slows other drivers. If a race is causing too much trouble, Arcade Race mode allows practicing without penalty. The only races available in Arcade are the ones unlocked through Championship, so the high requirement of placing first to move on is a big hurdle. The same applies to Multiplayer, which allows up to four players and features its special battle mode, "Ass Battle." The graphics are an excellent 3D rendition of the television show's style, and the same actors voice the funny, swearing characters. Sadly, the grinding for first place in every race with loose controls makes the experience feel more like work and less like a novel, entertaining racing experience.

Reflections: I didn't mind *South Park Rally* that much when I first tried it out. I thought, "Oh, cool. It's not like other racing games." Plus, the characters swear at each other just like I do when driving in real life (except I don't have a censor to bleep out my more offensive expletives)! If the language bothers you, there is plenty of other objectionable material, so don't even try playing with the sound turned off. Not unless you're open to pretending that the middle-aged woman in an abundance of makeup just splattered strawberry jam on your face. Haha, nope! No herpes here! – KY

European Cartridge

South Park: Chef's Luv Shack

Genre: Action, Game Show
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios Austin
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: None
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

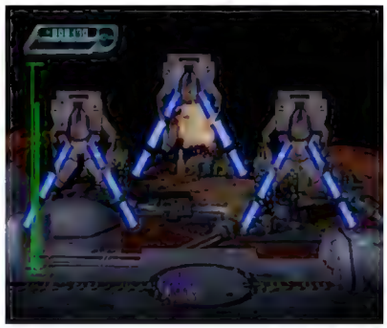
Chef has a TV quiz show, but Cartman, Kyle, Stan, and Kenny are the only contestants. Vie to score high and win $12! The visuals mirror the source material's 2D construction paper style. Up to four people can compete at a time, taking turns answering trivia questions and playing mini-games. At the start, players can set the number of rounds, ranging from two to eight, then take turns choosing question categories with vague, humorous titles (The "P" in Pool, Hippie Crap, Foul Balls). Quizzes are multiple choice and range from real-world trivia to references to the South Park show. For each, the question appears at the top of the screen. When buzzing in, four possible answers are displayed at the bottom. The current player has 10 seconds to find the right one but will lose points for wrong answers. Players are also tempted to "shaft" opponents by forcing them to answer. Some categories open a "Double Down" that gives a chance to wager points on the next question. Players can also trigger a spin on the Wheel of Fortuitousness or a special Pressure Round featuring 10 questions on one subject. There are Gameplay Rounds between quizzes, which can be single- or multiplayer. In the quiz sections, controls are menu-based, while the mini-game sequences display individual instructions just before they begin. For example, in a soda pop shell game, the D-pad chooses the selected can, and in "Asses in Space," players blast "ass-teroids" with A and move with B and the D-pad. Some of these mini-games are cloned arcade classics like Galaga and Warlords, although this makes them easily accessible. Disappointingly, there's no save feature for scores and quiz progress or computer opponents, so playing is a start from scratch each time. This lack of progress makes the single-player mode feel mostly meaningless, though multiplayer can be fun with friends who love *South Park*.

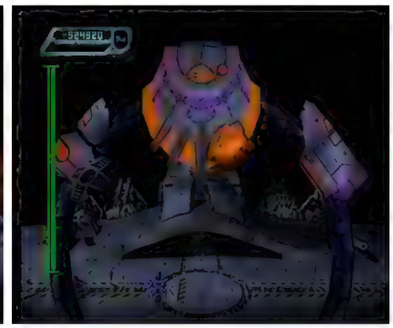
Reflections: I asked a friend about *South Park: Chef's Luv Shack*. He said he had it as a kid and enjoyed it because he loves trivia. That seems to be a common opinion. Despite being poorly regarded, even by *South Park*'s creators, people who played this remember it fondly. Maybe that's due to the console's dearth of quiz titles. It could be because this borrowed elements from *You Don't Know Jack* (screws, "Dis or Dat," etc.) and combined them with *Mario Party*-style mini-games. *Luv Shack* was also released on PlayStation, PC, and Dreamcast, and those consoles' roomy CD-ROMs allow Chef to read questions aloud, which he doesn't do on the N64. Today, there are certainly better quiz/game show options, but this title did fill a hole in the console's library. – KN

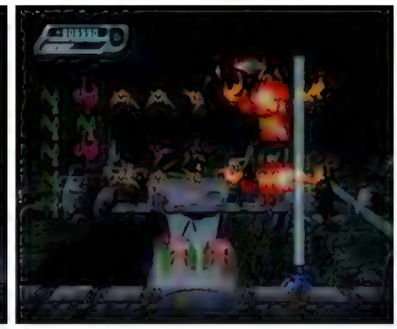
European Cartridge

Space Invaders

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Z-Axis
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

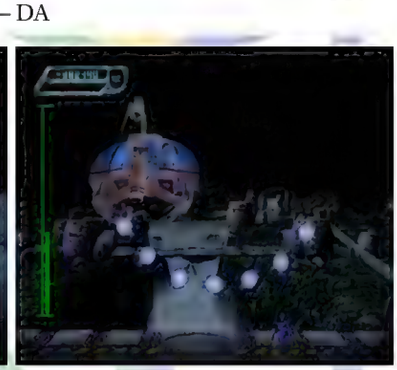






In 1978, aliens invaded from the heavens. The singular Tank, a mobile arsenal of limitless firepower, thwarted their attack. Twenty years later, these strangers have returned; once again, only the mighty Tank can beat them. This installment in the well-known shooter franchise trades Japanese whimsy for a more austere, militaristic veneer. Fortunately, the basic action holds true to tradition, placing players inside a lonesome turret that strafes at the bottom across a static, 2D playfield, exchanging volleys with the incoming rows of attackers. As their numbers dwindle, the aliens fall faster – harder to shoot and harder to dodge. Should one reach the surface, they scrap a one-billion-dollar tank, naturally. Earth is not the only world at stake this time. Players must now travel planet-to-planet, chasing aliens across the solar system. These battles are mostly rote, ten-wave affairs but are slightly redeemed by a unique boss encounter at the end. Higher difficulty settings add Mercury and the invaders' homeworld to the mix, creating a 100-stage campaign overall. However, the most interesting wrinkle is the power-up system. Defeating four consecutive aliens of a given color grants a special one-shot attack. For normal foes, this might mean a rocket that slices through entire rows of enemies, but for more specialized types, these bonuses can be devious strategic devices. Jupiter's Freezer invader, for instance, divebombs the player directly but also offers the satisfying Acidic Cloud, a nasty gas that melts through swarms like water drizzled across cotton candy. Likewise, Mother Ships supply shields, double-shot upgrades, and other baubles, while occasional blockades provide cover and offensive options. Despite all of these refinements, no number of tweaks can fully compensate for the limited graphics, bad music, and repetitive gameplay that resides within. It is an intriguing revamp of a classic but offers minimal improvements.

Reflections: "It hasn't aged well" is an unfortunate common refrain among many retro enthusiasts. Despite its classic status, Taito's original 1978 *Space Invaders* is often seen as a dull affair in light of newer titles – including *Galaxian*, a game released just one year later. Indeed, the series has been largely usurped by the clones it inspired. With the N64 outing, Z-Axis achieved a decent upgrade to the original's more solid design, but the additions fail to spruce up the core mechanics, nor do they push the series in a new direction. The design choices perhaps influenced 2008's brilliant *Space Invaders Extreme*, a title that couples the "shoot four" mechanic with trippy music and psychedelic delights. – DA



Space Station: Silicon Valley

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Oct. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: DMA Design
Pub.: Take-Two Interactive Software
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Dan Danger and his robot partner Evo are sent to explore Silicon Valley, a space station that has mysteriously reappeared after a 1,000-year absence. Unfortunately, Evo becomes damaged during landing, leaving only a microchip, which can be transplanted into any animals inhabiting Silicon Valley (which, fortunately, are robotic themselves). Given tasks from Dan Danger, Evo uses this ability to complete 30 platforming 3D levels across four Earth-like environments of the station, such as the overgrown Jungle Safari. In a third-person view, Evo's control over the robotic fauna begins by using fairly innocuous creatures like sheep and bears. Each animal has its attacking abilities (the scorpion shoots electricity or snips with its claws, the parrot dive bombs from the air, etc.), while other non-offensive capabilities help Evo accomplish objectives, like activating switches or collecting items. Evo begins a level in a pre-selected animal form, but defeating others makes them available for the microchip to hop, skip, and jump right in, allowing an "Evo"-lution to enhanced creature versions like heli-rabbits and cannon camels. There is a great variety of animals to learn and master through each region, and their skills (from dashing and jumping to lifting and flying) provide new ways to navigate the hazards, including levitating platforms, fireballs, and deep water that can hinder water-averse creatures. Once all missions of a level are complete, a teleporter becomes accessible for Evo to exit back to the ship. Completing the first three levels of a region opens the first level of the following region, allowing some freedom in completion order. Waiting in each region's final level is a piece of Evo's shellsuit, and collecting all four brings Evo back to its original form and opens the Silicon Valley control room with all the secrets hidden within. While this platformer brings an interesting concept to gameplay, the controls can cause frustration. Because so many levels require defeating other creatures, the lack of precision in attacks and camera angle makes fighting feel unnecessarily difficult. Fortunately, most offensive abilities have an area of effect, compensating for this imprecision. There are sprinklings of humor throughout, from Dan's snarky interjections to the silly creatures Evo controls, which include a tortoise that looks like a military tank and a giant kangaroo wearing boxing gloves, all while jazzy, upbeat music plays in the background. This romp through futuristic, natural environments offers an intriguing experience worth a play.

Reflections: *Space Station: Silicon Valley* has the unfortunate distinction of being the only known N64 title that can crash if played on a console with the Expansion Pak inserted, so hopefully, you have the original Jumper Pak in your console if you wish to play it. I love Evo for being resilient, loyal, and adaptable. I hate Dan Danger for being lazy and uncaring. In a mission brief, he says, "I can't be bothered to help you." As if Evo hasn't done enough for you, Dan! My interpersonal issues with a video game character aside, I really enjoyed the level design. The animals you control change how you can approach an obstacle or complete a task. In addition, having secret missions in each zone that award you a souvenir brings an extra element toward replayability and level exploration in a game where you are essentially playing as a microchip. A microchip I would gladly befriend and treat better than Dan ever would. – KY

European Cartridge

Spider-Man

Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Neversoft Entertainment
Ported by: Edge of Reality
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Help out everyone's favorite friendly neighborhood web-slinger as he fights a diverse assortment of evildoers, including the genius Doctor Octopus, hard-headed Rhino, nefarious Scorpion, and unsettling symbiotes Venom and Carnage, to save New York City from a mysterious poison fog. Players control Spider-Man from a third-person perspective and can run, jump, crawl, and web swing with ease, thanks to an intuitive controller setup. Spidey's combat actions are performed via combos and allow a variety of punches, kicks, and web-based attacks; these moves feel good to pull off, and unrelenting enemy assaults allow for constant experimentation. The only downside to the combat and movement mechanics is the awful camera. A near-complete lack of control (aside from basic centering) presents consistent frustration, especially in more cramped spaces. The adventure roams across a 34-level campaign and tasks the player with swinging between skyscrapers against a timer, beating up henchmen, outrunning attack helicopters, and going toe-to-toe with superpowered villains – most of these mission types can also be performed outside of the campaign via training modes. There is an assortment of bonus costumes to unlock by meeting criteria such as completing the campaign on the hardest difficulty and collecting comic books hidden throughout each level, providing a good deal of replayability. The level presentation becomes somewhat monotonous in the latter half of the adventure, with open cityscapes and construction areas giving way to repetitious sewers and warehouses. However, the great fighting animations, a wide variety of enemy designs (both standard and supervillains), and comic book page-styled cutscenes mostly make up for the occasional scenic humdrum. The auditory presentation is equally noteworthy, with extensive in-game voice acting, including Spider-Man's co-creator Stan Lee providing alliterative narration at pivotal moments and Spidey infusing a constant dose of sarcasm into the action. Though the lack of camera controls and occasional level monotony are definite stumbling blocks, excellent movement, rewarding combat, and solid presentation ensure an overall pleasant experience.

Reflections: Licensed games usually do not exist in a vacuum from their represented franchises. To this end, I was very happy to see how thoroughly the developers researched Spider-Man's rich history. A great example is the unlockable bonus costumes, ranging from well-known favorites like Spider-Man 2099's suit to more obscure selections like the Captain Universe uniform. Including a wide array of Spider-Man's villains and crossover cameos from allies such as Captain America, The Punisher, and Daredevil also helped make this adventure feel like one part of a greater universe just waiting to be explored. – CP

Star Fox 64

Lylat Wars (EU)
Genre: Rail Shooter, Vehicular Combat
Release Date: Apr. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

The mad simian scientist Andross, striking from his home base on the enigmatic planet Venom, has commenced an all-out attack on the Lylat System. Players hop into the cockpit of Fox McCloud, leader of the legendary Star Fox mercenary team, in this 3D rail shooter. He and his squadmates – the wisened veteran hare Peppy, cheerful but clumsy toad Slippy, and arrogant avian Falco – will dogfight through ruined cities, asteroid fields, and even the surface of a star to stop Andross's wicked schemes. Fox's adventures unfold in three vehicles – the nimble Arwing starfighter, sturdy Landmaster tank, and submersible Blue-Marine. These machines are vital for success, as players will be using them to fight from a starting point to a boss encounter on each world that Team Star Fox saves. Each vehicle handles exceptionally well thanks to smooth, intuitive controls, fun maneuvers such as barrel rolls, and an excellent camera that can be switched between first- and third-person perspectives. The vehicles can take a decent beating with their energy shields, and their offense is even better, thanks to lasers and smart bombs. Lasers can be upgraded twice for more potency and shot freely or charged for a more powerful single shot, while the limited but replenishable bombs explode with enough force to clear entire groups of foes. These weapons feel immensely satisfying thanks to the vibrant visual style and highly varied enemy designs. Both shields and weapons can be replenished (or upgraded for lasers) by flying through power-ups.

The journey unfolds across six missions that occur in 15 different locations, including planets, space stations, and dangerous sectors of the cosmos. The first and last missions always occur respectively on the verdant planet Corneria and inhospitable Veno, but every mission between them will be determined by factors such as saving squadmates or destroying a set number of enemies. Track progress through the campaign with colored lines connecting planets on the mission select screen – blue denotes an easy route, yellow is a normal progression, and red represents the hardest challenges. The player can easily hop between difficulty levels by adjusting their playstyle, resulting in highly customizable routes that encourage several playthroughs. These treks are always unique thanks to a vast, unpredictable swathe of enemy types, ranging from classic sci-fi fare – starfighters and mechs – to more outlandish foes like worms and sprinting monkey statues. In addition to these missions, players can participate in battles against their friends via multiplayer. Up to four pilots can compete to destroy each other a set number of times (from one to five) in Point Match, within an allotted time (from one to five minutes) in Time Trial, or simply duke it out with one life each in Battle Royal. Every multiplayer mode is playable using the Arwing, Landmaster, or the pilots on foot (the latter two must be unlocked in the single-player campaign), creating a wide breadth of options for combat. With incredible controls, a fantastic roster of missions that can be experienced in various orders, and an equally compelling multiplayer component, time spent with Team Star Fox is always sure to be well spent.

Reflections: While I could probably write a novel about *Star Fox 64*'s accomplishments, I think perhaps its greatest achievement is how thoroughly it engages the player's imagination. The visual design allows for enemies that feel like part of a living army, planets that betray compelling stories through their ruined architecture and alien skies, and characters who feel complex and worth rooting for or against. These visuals are coupled with gameplay that allows players a wonderful range of movement controls, simple yet effective options for fighting, and both extrinsic (power-ups and different routes) and intrinsic (feelings of satisfaction and bragging rights) rewards for both creative thinking and taking the time to hone their piloting skills. All of these factors combine to form an experience that is as unforgettable as it is replayable – hours, weeks, years, and decades after the first time blazing through Corneria's war-torn atmosphere. – CP

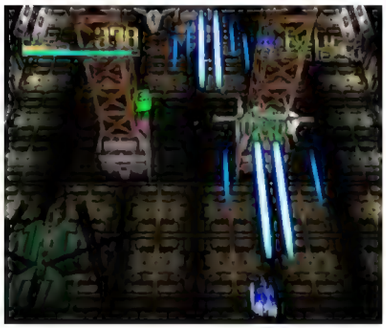
European Cartridge
Lylat Wars

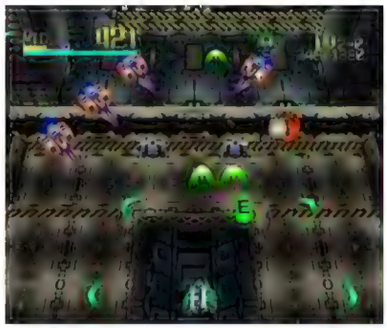
Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

Star Soldier: Vanishing Earth

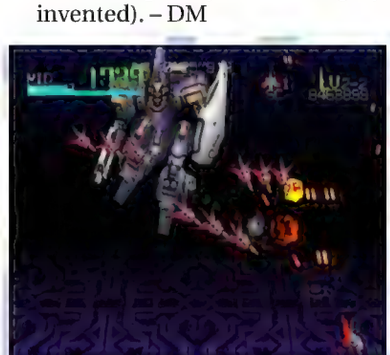
Genre: Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Electro Brain (NA), Hudson Soft (JP)
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆





An army of sentient alien robots known as the Zeograds are waging war upon humankind. Players must save the day by taking control of an advanced starship designed by Earth's Special Interception Air (SIA) Force. After choosing one of three futuristic fighters, players take to the skies in this vertically scrolling, top-down 2.5D space shooter. Each SIA starship boasts a powerful array of specialized weapons engineered for toasting hostile aliens through six grueling main levels. The F98 Vendium fires a sweeping spread shot, the F98 Lathyrus emits highly destructive laser beams, and the F98 Wisteria vaporizes foes with a powerful wave shot. A skillful pilot can pull off a well-timed roll to evade attacking ships and create a temporary barrier – an essential mechanic that will be utilized greatly. The player's ship's speed can be adjusted while flying and engages the Backfire Attack at the same time. Each starfighter is also equipped with the mighty ExARMS weapon, designed to annihilate everything in its path in two different attack types. Picking up "E" capsules replenishes the ExARMS, while collecting "P" icons upgrades the primary weapon's rate of fire and range. Missions involve navigating through asteroid fields, flying along the surface of Mars, and finally negotiating the enemy's base orbiting Jupiter. Countless Zeograd mechs are in pursuit, but persevering to the end of each level will result in facing a formidable robot boss or flagship that blocks the way to the next stage. The Zeograd onslaught is intense, so annihilating each swarm to boost the score and earn as many extra lives as possible is key. The graphics are colorful, with a wide variety of enemy machines on the prowl and some flashy attacks available. Oddly, the Zeograd robots and spaceships all feel like contemporary mecha designs, but they speak like antique automatons straight out of a 1950s B movie. Voiceovers throughout are a fun touch, though, and the music is suitably upbeat and driving. While this space shooter is fluid, fast-paced, and satisfying, it offers nothing uniquely engaging. There is plenty of space shooter fun, but maybe not enough to get pilots back in the cockpit for too many go-arounds.

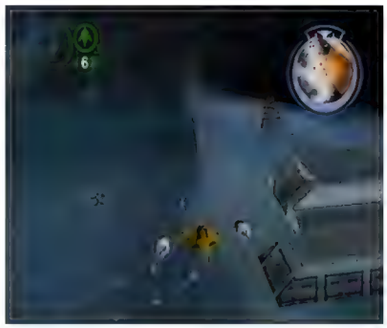
Reflections: One of the precious few space shooters on the Nintendo 64, *Star Soldier* falls squarely in the medium difficulty range. This sweet spot is rare for a game of this genre, which is often notorious for its absurdly high level of challenge. The action shouldn't be too daunting for those at least somewhat familiar with this style. Would-be pilots new to the genre should find this a fairly accessible introduction to space shooters. While this title isn't necessarily a cakewalk, it certainly isn't frustratingly hard like the legendary "bullet hell" games of the genre. I suppose it would be fair to place this one squarely in the category of "bullet purgatory" (which I just invented). – DM

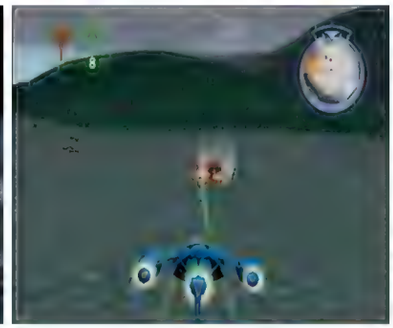


Japanese Cartridge

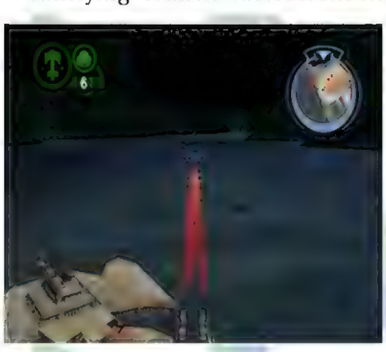
Star Wars Episode I: Battle for Naboo

Genre: Flight Combat, Vehicular Combat
Release Date: Dec. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Factor 5, LucasArts
Publisher: LucasArts
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆





Witness a galactic civil war from the view of Gavyn Sykes, a lieutenant in Naboo's military, as he pilots a variety of vehicles across 15 regular stages and three bonus stages in this third-person dogfighting and vehicle combat sim. Initial stages are confined to land-based speeders dashing across Naboo, but as the player progresses, they will unlock ships like the N-1 Starfighter and Police Cruiser that can take to the skies with 360-degree movement. Early-level goals primarily involve clearing areas before enemy attack droids, battle tanks, or TIE fighters destroy a set target. Later missions have forces taking down components of a larger structure (defensive satellites, for example) to clear the way for an assault on a main base. After completing a level, bronze, silver, gold, and platinum medals are awarded based on enemies destroyed, accuracy, lives used, and other factors. Master a stage to unlock secret stages and bonus vehicles like the Sith Infiltrator and a 1969 Buick Convertible. There is an amazing amount of graphical polish, but much of it is squandered due to the focus on drab grays, greens, and browns dominating planetside environments, alternating with the black void of space. The analog stick flight controls and automatic camera feel a little loose and take some time to adjust to. Still, the difficulty curve is generous if the player can stomach an over-reliance on escort missions. Using the R button for quick turns is welcome, making combat nice and zippy. The sound is also a highlight, with an orchestral feel to the music and a surprising amount of voice work for a cartridge-based game. While this isn't an essential or revolutionary experience, it is still a fun combat flight sim title with plenty of secrets to uncover and a satisfying "crunch" factor from enemy explosions.



Reflections: Released in the Nintendo 64's final year, *Battle for Naboo* is the fourth Star Wars game on the console and the second based on the divisive *Episode 1* movie. The title employs an advanced particle system that allows rain and snow effects with up to 3,000 particles on-screen simultaneously, all without hammering the N64's CPU or impacting framerates. A built-in password-based cheats system lets you unlock just-for-fun features, change the difficulty, and even open up in-game audio commentary from the developers – a first for the video game world. Getting insight into the level design from the programmers' perspective is fascinating, though this and the other extras don't translate into a better gameplay experience. – SG

European Cartridge

Star Wars Episode I: Racer

Genre: Racing
Release Date: May 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: LucasArts Entertainment
Publisher: LucasArts Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆

Anakin Skywalker, a tragic hero of the Star Wars mythos, trades Jedi training for championship Podracing in this third/first-person what-if spin on the saga's most dangerous pastime. The tyke now travels the galaxy, competing in four unscrupulous tournaments spread over 25 ruthless courses, including ones on a marsh planet of erupting sulfur, a world of crumbling glaciers, and a moon of bottomless, weightless drops. Players must not only survive these fretful tests but also place fourth or better to participate in the next race. Podracers are not exactly user-friendly, either; essentially, they control like sleds yanked by rickety rocket engines, brittle machines that shatter like glass and whip about like paper kites. Worse, braking means losing – a sign of surrender to rivals who never stop. Constant acceleration is the one true approach to victory, bolstered by short, nitrous-like boosts players can use so long as their engines do not overload. Conversely, holding R repairs the inevitable damage each track brings, but at a significant cost in speed. For narrow escapes, the left and right C-buttons roll the racer sideways, while their up and down counterparts toggle the four camera perspectives and rear-facing view, respectively. In between races, the player can swap their pilot out for one of 22 others, each with unique characteristics. Gasgano, for instance, suffers from poor handling and turning, but the unlockable Sebulba commands great stats in every area, including a mean top speed. Even the weakest racers can be redeemed by frequenting Watto, a shifty parts dealer always happy to sell enhancements in exchange for some hard-won truguts (money). Those seeking a more arcade-like experience can opt for the simpler Free Play and Time Attack modes or challenge a friend for a split-screen excursion. Outside an inconsistent difficulty curve, clunky upgrade interface, and an oddly intermittent musical score, this high-speed experience honors the franchise's pulpy, fun-loving spirit. The films' famous "lived-in" aesthetic and intense sense of scale are reproduced with the love only a fan could gather, resulting in a racer that dares transcend its very namesake.

Reflections: *The Phantom Menace* movie remains a sore subject, with detractors and defenders alike swearing by the production's myriad sins and wins. Fortunately, *Episode I: Racer* carries no such infamy – it's a fun thrill ride even by contemporary standards. The only debate is which version to play, with the Dreamcast and PC entries generally regarded as the superior choices. Players can also opt for remastered editions for the PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch. Or, for a different take on Podracing, track down the incredible *Star Wars: Racer Arcade*, a wholly separate coin-op experience co-developed and released by Sega. – DA

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Star Wars: Rogue Squadron

Genre: Flight Combat
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Factor 5, LucasArts Entertainment
Publisher: LucasArts Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

As Luke Skywalker, lead the Rebel Alliance's Rogue Squadron into battle in 15-plus aerial combat missions against the evil Galactic Empire! The free-flying 3D planetary combat stages in environments like mountains, spice mines, and city locales test the player's mettle against ground and air targets from inside the cockpit or a third-person view. Five default ships, such as the quick but weak A-Wing, the heavier Y-Wing bomber, and the versatile X-Wing fighter, can be piloted. Aerial foes such as TIE fighters and swift TIE interceptors must be dispatched with blaster cannons, while more powerful ground and air targets like pesky missile turrets may need to be dealt with using a limited supply of missiles, proton torpedoes, or bombs (depending upon the ship). Crafty piloting can help evade enemy fire by banking, looping, and thrusting/braking. Rolling the ship is available in all but the Airspeeder and V-Wing, although the latter has a reusable booster scramjet. Evading enemy fire is nearly impossible, so thankfully, almost all flyable ships come with limited shields to take the brunt of attacks. The Airspeeder is only armored, making nimble maneuvering more of a necessity, especially when using its special tow cable to circle and trip the legs of the giant AT-AT walkers. Missions have multiple objectives and are typically defensive escort or rescue operations to protect Rebel allies or offensive "seek and destroy" raids to take out Imperial factories or support networks. Fortunately, a helpful radar display directs the player towards objectives and separates friend from foe during these runs, although there is no indicator for targets' altitudes. Dogfighting and air-to-ground are mostly tense and satisfying, although successfully "leading" and dispatching moving targets with blasters may take some practice. Wingmen can be useful but count on doing most of the dirty work, like clearing ground Turbolasers before they perforate the squadron or the allies being protected. Missiles and proton torpedoes do not seek targets by default, so they have limited use against enemies like TIE bombers. However, missiles/torpedoes and offensive/defensive abilities can be unlocked by collecting well-hidden bonuses on certain missions. Without these bonuses, the player may find themself quickly wasting the three available ships on later, tougher missions, although the campaign can be continued.

Mission replayability is integrated via a medal system. Completing missions with certain criteria (completion time, enemies destroyed, shot accuracy, friendly saves) awards bronze, silver, and gold medals. Collecting all bronze, silver, and gold medals unlocks up to three extra missions and more selectable ships. Additional ships, game options, and Easter eggs are available via a passcode system. Visually, the experience impresses when using the Expansion Pak, with clear and detailed models and great effects. However, the distance "fog" could be better, as incoming objects and enemies sometimes do not appear until closer than is sometimes comfortable. The presentation is outstanding, with well-acted voice mission briefings and nice story cutscenes that move the gameplay along. Sound effects are faithful to the franchise, with punchy cannons, R2-D2 droid beeps, and screeching of various fighter ships filling the air and making the player wince when taking blaster damage. The impressive orchestral score shines and adds to the cinematic gaming experience. While imperfect, this struggle against the Empire brings plenty of thrills in a technically superior effort.

Reflections: Following the massive success of *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire*, Factor 5 was chosen to bring this second N64 franchise title to life, based upon an all-new story provided by LucasArts. The plot is set between *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back* and is not based on the preexisting Rogue Squadron books and comic books. *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* follows in the footsteps of the rail shooter *Rebel Assault* (1993) and the excellent space combat simulators *X-Wing* (1993) and *TIE Fighter* (1994) on the PC. To Factor 5's credit, *Rogue Squadron* manages to tiptoe the line between the two styles well enough to mesh into a hybrid experience all its own. A technical marvel at the time, the use of additional memory from the new Expansion Pak allowed double the normal graphics resolution and better detail. In-house sound development and advanced compression techniques allowed excellent sound effects and higher-quality music to fit on the cartridge. Two sequels would follow on the GameCube in 2001 and 2003. – PC

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire

Genre: Third-Person Shooter, Flight Combat, Vehicular Combat
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: LucasArts
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆

As the Rebel Alliance and Galactic Empire battle it out, Prince Xizor, head of the Black Sun crime syndicate, hatches some plans of his own. Dash Rendar must thwart Xizor's efforts and save his allies in a mix of 3D ground action and vehicular combat featuring a single-player campaign of 10 levels over four chapters. The action primarily consists of third-person laser shooting, though camera controls allow for various perspectives, including first-person. Leebo, a pilot droid sidekick, chimes in with dialog that indicates objectives, such as dispatching Empire forces (stormtroopers, probe droids, gun turrets, etc.) or reaching the end of an area. Limited-use weapons, like seeker missiles or pulse cannons, can be found scattered through levels, along with extra lives and collectible Challenge points. That said, Dash's blaster can easily dispatch most basic foes, while boss battles are exercises in constantly circling and strafing, peppering in as much offense as openings allow. Dash must also jump and maneuver platforms, particularly in the hovertrain sequence on Ord Mantell. The jetpack, acquired midway through the adventure, opens vertical exploration. While these areas look and sound right at home in a galaxy far, far away, they also vary greatly. The on-foot segments' level design and enemy placement work better in some stages than others. On the other hand, vehicle sections are especially engaging. They convey a cinematic feel of the setting with well-tuned and dynamic combat paired with excellent sound effects, from the expertly crafted opening flying a snowspeeder on the ice planet Hoth to the thrilling space battle pitting the Outrider against the Skyhook. Integrating these multiple modes of play and tying in original Star Wars trilogy events and characters helps the experience feel thematically similar to the movies. However, playing as Dash lets the plot pivot in ways that make it feel unique. There is little replayability, and the lone adventure is relatively short, but the fun story and vehicle sections make Dash's experience memorable.

Reflections: Intended as a bridge between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, the "Lucas Empire" went on a media blitz with *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire* that included a novel, toys, comics, and even sourcebooks for the West End Games edition of the Star Wars D6 tabletop RPG. This comprehensive mentality definitely found its way into the design choices here! Inside is a bevy of hidden goodies, including secret text in the credits, unlockables from Challenge points, a debug mode, and playing as different vehicles or enemies with the correct save file name and controller codes. The experience is not long or terribly great, but there is more good than bad to be found aboard the Outrider. – DG

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

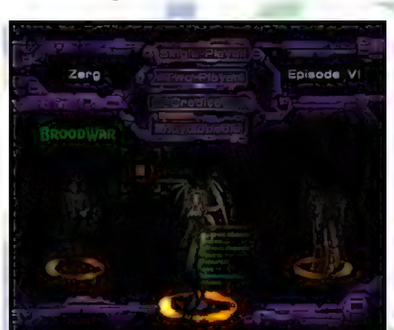
NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

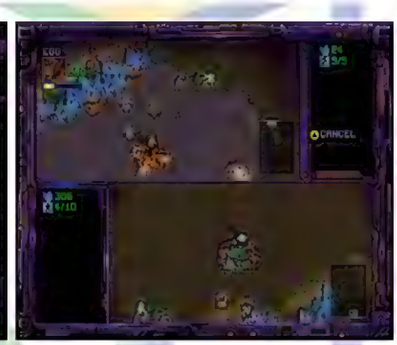
Starcraft 64

Genre: Real-Time Strategy
Release Date: June 2000
Region: NA, PAL (AUS)
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Ported by: Mass Media
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Lead a faction to victory in the distant star systems of the Koprulu Sector in this real-time 2D strategy title. Players can build and battle through single-player story campaigns for three races: the resilient and adaptive Terrans, the insect-like Zerg, and the technologically superior Protoss. There is a progression of missions in various environments, including deserts, urban ruins, and even space platforms. In most missions, the goal is first to harvest resources to build structures (barracks, missile turret, science facility, etc.) and military units of various strengths. The following objective is usually to either assault the enemy, infiltrate a base, or defend something, depending on the requirements. Each race has a unique tech tree that requires certain buildings to unlock new units. These buildings can then be upgraded by spending resources on researching new technology, which brings added skills and abilities to the units, such as enhanced speed for Zerglings or the Protoss Templar's Psionic Storm lightning attack. The original computer mouse-and-keyboard controls are well adapted to the more limited layout of an N64 controller. Building is possible without having to select specific units, for example, and units can be selected by type or by area or even assigned to one of the C-buttons as a hotkey. Enemy AI is somewhat intelligent and reacts to attacks with vicious counter-offensives at the worst possible time. The 2D sprite-based graphics are a little blurry, but every unit and structure is still easily identifiable. With the Expansion Pak, *Starcraft: Brood War* is unlocked, offering new units and new single-player missions for each race, as well as a split-screen co-op for two players. Unfortunately, there is significant slowdown in some missions and multiplayer mode when many units are on the screen. This occasional sluggishness does not render the action unplayable, but it dampens the experience. This epic space battle is a well-balanced, engaging, and fun strategy experience, especially for solo players.

Reflections: I cut my real-time-strategy teeth on *Starcraft* for the PC, and the experience of playing this version on a console with an N64 controller instead of a mouse and keyboard is surreal. I thought it would be frustrating at best and unplayable at worst, but after a few minutes of adjusting, it was second nature. The slightly muddy graphics and gameplay slowdown made me shy away from this title for some years, but having sat with it again, it truly is impressive what the team managed to cram into this cartridge. Admittedly, I miss the hero unit voice acting from the PC version, but staring down a Zergling rush and wondering how I would survive was as thrilling as ever. – CW

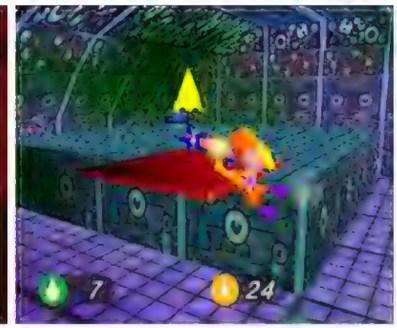




Australian Cartridge

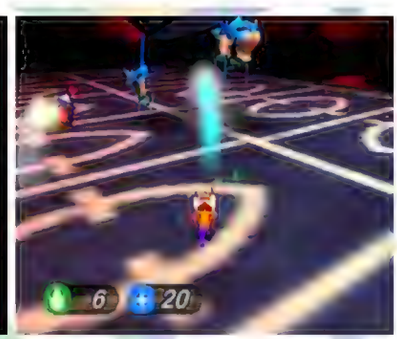
Starshot: Space Circus Fever

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: June 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Infogrames Europe
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆



The Space Circus is in serious debt, and only the agile juggler Starshot and his brainy robot pal Willfall can save the day. This peppy but peculiar 3D platforming title sends players to six different planets to take on a variety of missions, from sabotaging enemy spaceships to finding rare and valuable creatures. These worlds include unique scenery in tropical archipelagoes, treetop villages, and sprawling space stations. Starshot can run, jump, and zap foes with his trusty blaster, which fires beams that can be controlled after they are emitted. When larger gaps need to be traversed, Starshot can grab onto rocket friend Willfly and soar through the air for short periods of time. Many bloodthirsty baddies roam each planet, from angry assassin robots to overgrown carnivorous fish. However, a bevy of power-ups help keep our heroes in the fight: blue stars provide blaster ammo, green icons restore health, and yellow wings add time to the flight meter. If Starshot ever gets turned around, friendly NPCs along the way remind the player of directives on each world. The camera tends to wander sporadically, with a frustrating knack for shifting the POV to the least helpful position, making maneuvering and platforming tough at times. Luckily, the camera can be adjusted with the touch of a button – a routine that players may quickly become accustomed to. Character models are chunky, and environments are sparse and lack detail or decoration, often reading like rough prototypes rather than final game assets. Obnoxiously loud sound effects drown out the otherwise enjoyable soundtrack, as well. For those who prefer platformers with irritating noises, lackluster visuals, and a camera with a mind of its own, hop aboard. Otherwise, it's probably better not to run away and join this particular Space Circus.

Reflections: *Starshot* is a collection of truly creative ideas, especially in the world-building department. The story is set around a futuristic circus in outer space. Our hero looks like a cross between Lucky the Leprechaun and a Thundercat, packing a weapon that shoots steerable laser beams. The villain is a rival intergalactic circus proprietor who flings countless minions at our heroes as he attempts to rid himself of the competition. It's a shame that a wonky camera and difficult controls mar these inventive ideas. The game doesn't deserve to be fed to the lions, but some form of punishment is warranted. A spirited squirt from the clown's seltzer bottle might be a good start. – DM



French Cartridge

Dutch Cartridge

German Cartridge

UK Cartridge

Stunt Racer 64

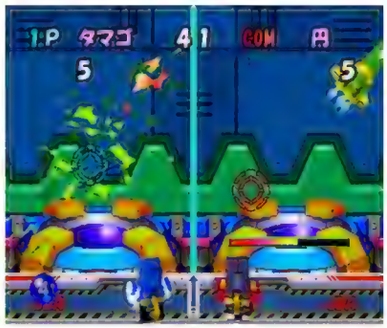
Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Boss Game Studios
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆☆

Strap in and hold on tight, as this futuristic racing title will have players on the edge of their seats. If an Expansion Pak is available, racing with up to four friends is possible. Otherwise, it is limited to two players simultaneously. Quick Race mode allows the player to choose any unlocked tracks and two stunt tracks. Contest mode allows players to join a League Race by choosing from one of the four drivers. There are five leagues to progress through, where new cars and tracks are unlocked by advancing. Each league consists of several rounds that must be won to earn a one-on-one race with the League boss and, ultimately, win their car. However, before jumping into a League Race, the player must pass a qualifying round of achieving different goals, such as performing stunts, collecting power-ups and coins, and attaining a specific top speed. The cars' handling feels a little floaty and may take some getting used to, especially with slower ones, but once faster cars become unlocked or upgraded, it becomes easier to avoid jerky turns and stay on track. During a race, performing stunts for money and collecting coins is essential to progress since cash is used to buy upgrades (body, engine, tires, turbo, and stunt jet) and new fantasy-type cars such as the Blown Z-Bucket or Hyperion. Stunts are easy to do, but landing them can sometimes be a little finicky; crashes happen even when it looks like the player has landed correctly. More complex stunts result in more cash, but there is a higher risk of wiping out. One of the best ways to earn money during a race is to collect a cash multiplier power-up (2X or 3X), increasing earned cash by collecting coins and performing stunts. Other power-ups to collect during a race include an instant nitrous boost (N), an extra turbo boost (T), or a mystery power-up (?) that can either change something on the track or award cash. There are only a dozen or so tracks. However, the action moves quickly, and the tracks are full of things to see, so they don't feel too repetitive. They are colorful with enormous moving features that show the track's theme well. They are also well designed; upcoming turns are obvious, and branching paths and hidden shortcuts are worked in. Sound effects and music are underwhelming, but a super smooth frame rate, excellent visuals, and fun gameplay make this title a must-try when looking for some arcade-style racing that does not take itself too seriously.

Reflections: The car designs really remind me of the Hot Wheels cars I used to have as a kid! I enjoyed how *Stunt Racer 64* made me want to continue trying to improve and advance. It offered enough of a carrot that I wanted to try out the next new car or upgrade to see and feel the difference. If you weren't lucky enough to get a copy of this Blockbuster Video rental exclusive when they closed their doors, good luck finding one now. – BC

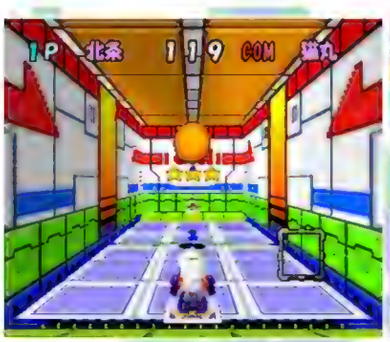
Super B-Daman: Battle Phoenix 64

Genre: Action, Shooter
Release Date: July 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Transfer Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆



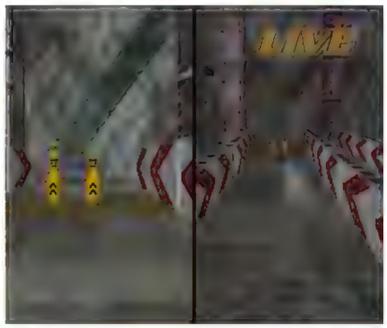
Take aim and shoot for victory in this party game about learning to handle B-Daman figures in glorious battles. B-Daman are marble-wielding collectible toys such as Fighting Phoenix, Wild Wyvern, and Stag Sphinx, all with different power, defense, speed, and rapid-fire stats. Pop into the main B-Da Mode to unlock everything, or go straight to the four-player battle mode against friends or the CPU to see whose B-Daman can survive in the arena until the end. Competing in the B-Da Battle Royale within B-Da Mode comes down to two-player face-offs in games of skill using minimal movement and simple quick or charged marble shots, most of which utilize a third-person viewpoint around a B-Daman. There are 10 mini-games to battle through. There are rail shooters like Trolley Shooting, Panda Darts Battle, and Hungry Dinosaurs, and shooting galleries like Gate Clear, Power Clash, and Whack-a-Mole. There are also variations of traditional sports: Billiard Battle, Air Ball Battle, and B-Daman Rally. Finally, Robot Battle has B-Daman duke it out in a rock-paper-scissors style of turn-based contest. Winning through B-Da Battle Royale unlocks new characters, modes, and stages, plus B-Da items, which are playable marbles with special attributes, such as causing an opponent's crosshairs to disappear or increasing a B-Da's power. There are nearly 70 B-Da items to collect, with the option to transfer earned B-Da items between the N64 and Game Boy Color versions via the Transfer Pak. The bright and enjoyable visuals emphasize the party game aspect of play, while the music and sound effects keep things upbeat. However, while simple, the controls demand precision, which can be hard to accomplish with all the visual noise on the screen. There's a lot to unlock, though much of it will be lost on players unfamiliar with the source material. Still, there's a unique party game to be had that delivers a well-rounded experience.

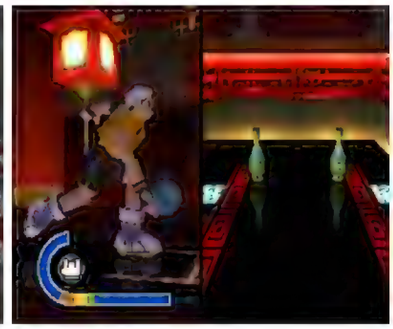
Reflections: Like many Japanese-only titles, a lot is happening that Western players might not know. To start, B-Daman is a bit of wordplay on the Japanese word for marble, *bīdama*. It's also no coincidence that the B-Daman figures look like toys since they started life as a toy line from Takara (now merged with Tomy) back in 1993, spawning multiple manga and anime series, none of which made their way stateside. While we may not have been privy to the (arguably) cool marble-shooting toys and all their many accessories, we did get an obscure run of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles toys called Ninja Shooters, which bear a striking resemblance to B-Daman both in appearance and function. A connection that *is* clear is that B-Daman is part of the Bomberman extended universe, even being modeled off of Shirobon, the White Bomber himself. It's a small world. – CPr

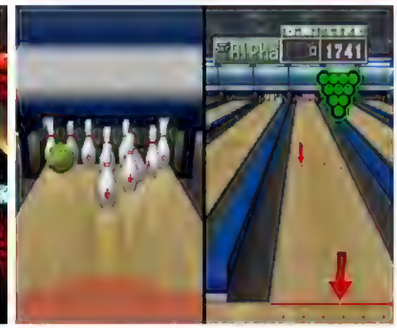


Super Bowling

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Jan. 2001
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Athena
Publisher: UFO Interactive (NA), Athena (JP)
Players: 1-4 (2 simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆







Break out the rosin bag for this goofy bowling simulator. True to the real-life sport, the basic goal is to throw a ball and knock down as many pins as possible at the end of each lane. A vertical split-screen presentation is omnipresent; when only one lane is being bowled on, the right half offers a dynamic view of the action while the left follows the ball on the lane. Players begin by adjusting their aim, starting point, spin, and throw power. Accuracy is determined by a timed stop on the throwing meter – the closer to the center of the yellow zone, the more accurate the throw. The ball can even be hooked by tilting the Control Stick. There are eight bowlers, each with their handedness, favorite ball weight, and ratings for power, accuracy, and hook. Right-handed Hiro and left-handed Alpha are available bowlers to start, but the other six must be earned, such as Penny the penguin or Fanny the fairy. Playable lanes feature one of four wax conditions to alter the difficulty and other unique features such as jersey walls as bumpers in Garage or a sudden drop into the water in River. Challenge Mode gives players difficult pin configurations they must clear in a single throw, with five retries allowed across ten taxing frames. Open Bowling features standard bowling rules in single, team, or doubles formats. Up to four players can join in at once, though only two play at any given moment. Golf features stroke or match play on a series of preset configurations of pins, with players trying to clear each in as few throws as possible. Acquisition Mode lets one player battle the computer in a best-of-three to unlock new bowlers and themed lanes. Finally, VS Mode pits two bowlers in a race – rather than scoring via frames, and players battle to survive by clearing pins to refill constantly decaying life meters. The use of power values for throws and the Control Stick to finesse the hook are welcome additions to the bowling experience. This does highlight the biggest weakness – the timing window on the accuracy meter. Alone, it is enough to chase away casual players, as it can be difficult to time correctly. Combined with the other control elements, it turns basic moves into complex actions, which may create a wall of frustration. An otherwise robust bowling experience awaits those rollers patient enough to scale the control barrier.

Reflections: My family is a bowling family – my grandfather and uncle both have 300 games under their belts. When it comes to video game bowling, the key for us isn't explaining the game but making the control scheme friendly to non-gamers. In this sense, *Super Bowling*'s shortcoming is not its wacky design or polygonal presentation but its imprecise timing window and the level of controller finesse required for modest success. This title is definitely built for gamers who like bowling, not bowlers who want a digital version of the sport. – DG

Japanese Cartridge

Super Mario 64

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

After years of leading a flat, left-to-right life, Nintendo's first big hero leaps to 3D in this paradigm-defining platformer. The story is familiar, but the twist is different – the villainous Bowser has not only kidnapped Princess Peach but has done so within the halls of her own sacred home, distorting the castle into a menagerie of traps and pocket dimensions hidden within walls and magical paintings. Mario must run, jump, stomp, and punch through these hostile landscapes, seeking enough Power Stars (70 at minimum out of 120 total) to reverse the curse and secure the girl. Unlike the 2D days when survival was a strictly linear affair, danger now comes from all sides, forcing players to be spatially aware. Moving Mario with the Control Stick is a satisfying and remarkably intuitive affair, making everything from tiptoeing to outright sprinting a simple joy to employ. Mario can also flip backward like an acrobat, duck, crawl, punch, swim, long jump over foes and chasms, slide down slopes, shimmy up trees, ground pound, wall jump, and so much more. The C-left and C-right buttons manually adjust the free-flying camera, while C-down zooms out and C-up zooms in. Pressing R snaps the perspective directly behind Mario when the camera fails to follow his flighty movements.

Mario can explore 15 themed stages, each built like an open playground filled with platforms, obstacles, items, and enemies like goombas, thwomps, pokeys, and Bob-ombs. Stages connect through the central hub that is Peach's castle and surrounding grounds, most of which are locked behind doors requiring a certain number of Power Stars to open. Courses vary by theme, difficulty, and design philosophy. Some, like Bob-omb Battlefield, are vast wonderlands of enemies to bop and hills to scale, while others, like the taxing Tick Tock Clock, are obstacle-laden gauntlets demanding focus and methodical timing. Their density is what unites these eclectic environments: each contains seven hidden Power Stars, offering do-gooders a feast of experiences as they search every nook and corner. In the desert world alone, Mario can ride a turtle shell up an enormous pyramid, fire from a cannon to out-soar a circling vulture, and battle a towering Egyptian idol in a thunderous, climactic fashion. Power-ups add even more possibilities: the Wing Cap allows Mario to temporarily fly across the sky while the Metal and Vanish Caps grant fleeting spurts of invincibility. Coins are also everywhere, useful for restoring Mario's life bar, and 1-up mushrooms give extra chances. Confrontations with Bowser, where Mario must grab the villain by the tail, are especially demanding and perilous. Catchy music, charming Mario voice samples from Charles Martinet, and clean, colorful graphics further enhance the already engrossing journey. However, the chief virtue transcends its whimsy, smart design, and numerous technical achievements. Simply put, it is pure exhilaration distilled into a cartridge – that ageless longing for adventure answered through a bumbling plumber as he runs, flails, fails, and triumphs across an experience forever remembered.

Reflections: The video game art form's evolutionary chart follows a bumpy trajectory, occasionally spiking at key, influential titles. It is a curious phenomenon, considering the sheer number of games released. *Spacewar!* graced MIT computers in 1962, kicking off the interactive medium. *Computer Space* in 1971 and *Pong* from Atari in 1972 marked the next milestone: arcade titles that made video games available to the masses. Then came *Space Invaders* (1978), *Pac-Man* (1980), and *Donkey Kong* (1981), each providing its own little boost to the video gaming experience. And finally, Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros.* was released on the NES in 1985. Its elaborate 2D worlds were a revelation, freeing gamers from the usual single-screen prisons of the day and providing an ever-stretching canvas to explore. It was a pocket dimension embedded on a microchip. It only made sense that series creator Shigeru Miyamoto would strike again with Mario's first 3D adventure. *Super Mario 64* gave players the freedom to explore three-dimensional playgrounds and do almost anything while there. Its epic scope, open-ended gameplay, dynamic camera, intuitive control scheme, and imaginative, hub-like structure would provide a template for future games (not just Nintendo's, either), all while firmly cementing Mario's place as gaming's greatest hero. – DA

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" "K-A" Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" "E" Cartridge

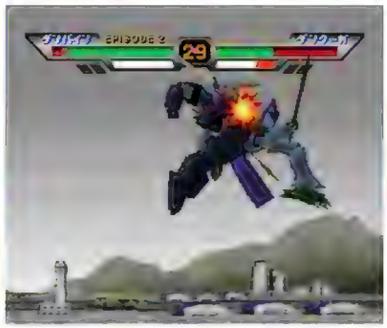
Super Mario 64 Shindō Pak Taiō Bājon

[Super Mario 64 Rumble Pak Compatible Version]
Genre: Platformer
Release Date: July 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

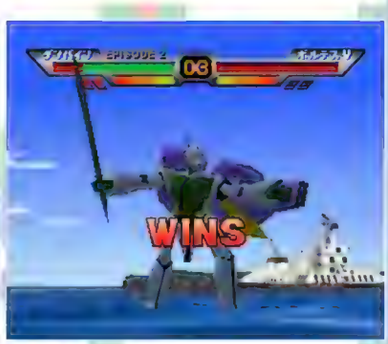
Also referred to as *Super Mario 64 Shindō Edition*, this re-release of the outstanding 3D platformer adds Shindō Pak (Rumble Pak) support to the game. In this version, Mario's interactions when being hit by or hitting enemies will result in vibration. The Rumble Pak also activates when collecting red coins and extra lives or when Mario does his forward dive and ground stomp. It can also be experienced in menus and when manipulating Mario's face on the title screen. Amongst other minor audio and visual differences, this version eliminates a movement glitch colloquially called the "Backwards Long Jump." A marketing phrase on the game box roughly translates to, "Get numb with the vibration pack!" Please refer to the previous entry for a complete review of this game title. – PC

Super Robot Spirits

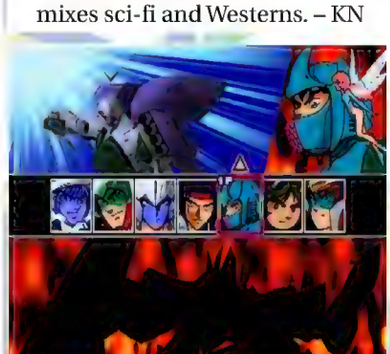
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: July 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Banpresoft, VertexEG
Publisher: Banpresto
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆



In this Super Robot Wars fighter spinoff, giant robot anime stars battle one-on-one. Seven mecha are available, such as Voltes V, Dancougar, Shining Gundam, and some unlockables like Master Gundam. The menus are robust, having several modes like Story, two-player Versus, Time Attack, Practice, and more, plus options for difficulty, controls, scores, and statistics. The graphics are 2.5D, with 3D characters moving on a 2D plane. Stages look generic but themed to their anime, like deserts for *Xabungle* and ruined cityscapes for *G Gundam*. The camera only sometimes changes perspective to accentuate special attacks, making the view somewhat dull. The player moves the character with the D-pad, punches with the B button, kicks with the A button, and fills the spirit meter by dealing damage. The player can spend spirit on special moves by pressing button combinations in sequence. For example, pressing away twice and punching makes Dunbine strike with its sword, or it grabs and flips the opponent if holding down and pressing kick and punch within arm's reach, or Daitarn 3 shoots a missile if tapping away from the enemy and pressing any C-button. By using the shoulder buttons, the mecha can fly and hover to different attacks from above, though most opponents have anti-air moves. Combinations vary, so a move list helps. There are some boss bouts, culminating with Judecca, an original villain from the Super Robot series. The robots' models and movements are accurate and accompanied by their theme songs and pilot voices. Although some real-time mecha animations exist, story cutscenes are feeble, using only portraits and text. However, supporting characters are included, such as Cham from *Dunbine*, *G Gundam*'s Rain, and the *Voltes V* crew. The core appeal builds off character recognition, so only ardent mecha anime fans will truly enjoy this, though others might have some fun with friends in Versus mode.



Reflections: Besides *G Gundam*, the characters of *Super Robot Spirits* are not well known in the United States (although some anime were released elsewhere outside Japan). I needed to research the rest of the anime for context, which made it more enjoyable. They all focus on the human pilots, feature excellent vintage animation, and are worth a look. Being from the 1970s, Daitarn 3 is in some ways a pre-*Transformers* Transformer, able to change into different vehicles. *Voltes V*'s titular robot is also prescient, being a combiner made up of five aircraft and their pilots, predating *Voltron*. *Dancouga*, from the 1980s, has a more serious tone, and its combiner robot has a crew of four. Also from the 1980s, *Aura Battler Dunbine* is an early "Isekai" anime set in a fantasy realm, while *Combat Mecha Xabungle* mixes sci-fi and Westerns. – KN



Super Robot Taisen 64

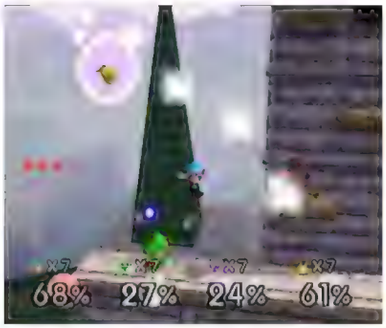
[Super Robot Wars 64]
Genre: Strategy, RPG
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Monegi
Publisher: Banpresto
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Transfer Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆

In the future, humanity has populated outer space but is still at war with itself, and now alien invaders have arrived to compound their troubles. Players must make strategic decisions commanding an army of giant robots featuring illustrious mecha anime stars, like Zambot 3, Mazinger, Dunbine, numerous Gundam robots, and original creations. Over 200 chibi-style fighters are well represented with music and sound from their anime and large sprite artwork, including pilot portraits. There are four pilots to play as, separating "real" robots set in realistic universes and "super" robots, which are more fantastical. Their stories are dialogue-rich and have branching paths for the player, allowing them to become invested in the entertaining storylines. Engagements begin with a bird's eye view of a 2D map with units represented by icons. On the player's turn, a menu gives the options to move, attack, use abilities, check stats, or special actions the selected unit might possess, like flight or transformation. When moving, green shading shows the unit's range on the map (affected by terrain); when attacking, there is red shading. All attacks appear in a separate cutscene view with animations, dialogue, and 3D backgrounds. However, these sequences can become repetitive and slow (not unusual for the genre). Battlefields and environments vary, with outer space, cities, forests, and more, although the maps lack detail and vivacity considering how often they are used. Enemies include humans, monsters, and known characters, for example, *Gundam*'s Tallgeese or Obelius from *Mazinger*. Between engagements, there is an intermission screen where players can save, do maintenance, upgrade abilities, and more. As the story progresses, different units can join the player's team. From the start menu, there are also features like karaoke mode and Transfer Pak support, linking it to *Super Robot Taisen Link Battler* for Game Boy Color for more characters and exclusives. Unfortunately, each encounter takes longer than it should, even with their natural slowness. The overhead map screens, which must be looked at for long stretches while strategizing, fall flat with their blandness. Despite this, each pilot's depth of play and variety of stories make for an impressive experience.

Reflections: I first saw the Super Robot Wars (SRW) series in the early 2000s when I heard there were Japanese PlayStation 1 and 2 games featuring *Evangelion* units. Screenshots and videos interested me, but I was disappointed to realize they wouldn't be released in English. Fortunately, some other SRW games officially include English. They're still being made today, with *SRW 30* (Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PC) released in 2021. The series has a fanbase outside Japan that can facilitate understanding menus, story paths, and more, although this N64 iteration lacks translation. – KN

Super Smash Bros.

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Apr. 1999
Regions: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆



Nintendo's most prominent names take center stage in this unique take on the fighting genre! Battles typically occur between two to four characters on polygonal platform stages with a 2D perspective. Eight characters are available at the start, such as Mario and Link, and four others are unlocked via "New Challenger" battles after completing hidden tasks. On this playground, fighters taste defeat by being battered far enough off-screen or away from platforms that they cannot jump back to or by being damaged enough that they fly away. This likelihood is indicated by the Damage Meter, which increases in percentage and makes fighters easier to knock around with each successive hit. Attacks are simple to execute but vary widely: A is for weak attempts but combines with tilting or tapping the Control Stick for strong and SMASH attacks. Offensive options range from standing and crouching attacks to jumping and dashing ones, including Mario's trip kick, Yoshi's headbutt, and Kirby's flurry punch. Each character has three B-button special abilities, like Captain Falcon's B-button Falcon Punch, Pikachu's B + DOWN Thunder attack, or Samus's B + UP Screw Attack. The B + UP move leaves the player unable to attack again until landing. While double jumping is available, this B + UP leap is a critical tool for making it back to the safety of a platform or ledge to grab (which creates a key play dynamic all its own). A replenishing bubble shield (that breaks from too many attacks and causes temporary dizziness), opponent throws, and a rolling dodge add a tactical layer to the melee, as do upward strikes and upward/downward jumping attacks. The interplay of offense, defense, and platforming makes for genuinely frenetic gameplay, especially in four-player contests. The consistent control scheme flows smoothly, is simple to pick up, and allows for crafting creative combos. This accessibility also encourages character experimentation and is an opportunity to explore the fighter balance, from the big-brawling Donkey Kong to the speedy Fox or the more technical Ness.

Besides the charismatic fighters, random elements spice up battles. Items fall/appear on the battlefield, ranging from throwing weapons like green/red shells, Bob-ombs, and Poké Balls containing random attacking creatures to shooting and melee weapons like the Ray Gun, Star Rod, lethal Home Run Bat, or devastating Hammer. Most items can be wielded or thrown, but a few exceptions exist – the Maxim Tomato and Heart Container restore the Damage Meter, while the Star provides brief invulnerability. Stages offer variety beyond their aesthetics and delightful game-specific theme music, as different locales have larger or smaller layouts, unique platform placement, and even threats of their own, like random tornadoes in Hyrule, rising acid on Planet Zebes, or Arwings flying by in Sector Z.

VS mode is the true heart and allows two to four human or CPU opponents (of nine difficulties) to battle it out in time (most kills after X minutes) or stock (lives) rules, either as a free-for-all or teams. Other VS options include handicaps, friendly fire, enabling/disabling stage selection, and adjusting the attack damage. 1P Game mode acts as a trainer of sorts for each character and consists of battling one-off characters, part of the roster, and a couple of bonus rounds on the way to facing off against Master Hand. The bonus rounds, in particular, vary per character and require mastery of that character's moves. Diligent players can use the training mode, practice Bonus rounds, and also, unlock a sound test, the ability to toggle specific items in VS mode, and the Mushroom Kingdom stage. Each character has four color variations, allowing for distinction and personalization. The blocky presentation is charming and personable, capturing the themes and styles of the various properties with bold color choices, a clean UI, and an on-point sound design (an enthusiastic crowd even chants for characters doing well in a match). This masterwork of multiplayer mayhem is limitless fighting fun and should be welcome in any N64 library.

Reflections: *Super Smash Bros.* certainly upended expectations for Nintendo's principal icons' otherwise carefully guarded intellectual property. Satoru Iwata and Masahiro Sakurai set out to create a four-player battle royale that took advantage of the N64 controller's unique design. The eventual decision to flavor the fighter with Nintendo's IP was an inspired one. At its core, *Super Smash Bros.* channels the childlike joy of fighting with action figures, as evidenced by everything from the tabletop transforming introduction sequence to Master Hand as a final boss. The lighter tone, frenetic pace, and variance of move sets captured lightning in a bottle in a way few works ever manage. *Super Smash Bros.* kicked off arguably the most influential local multiplayer franchise of all time, became a celebration of games and characters reaching far beyond Nintendo's own properties, and spawned one of gaming's most significant competitive scenes, securing its place in history. – DG

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

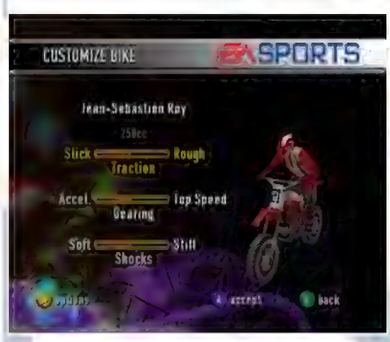
NA "-2" Variant Cartridge

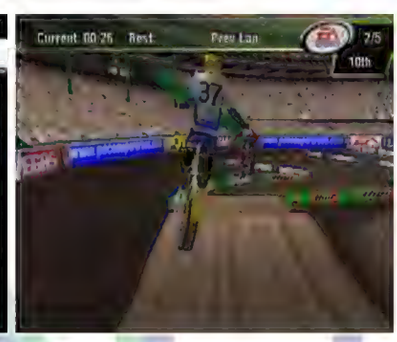
Supercross 2000

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: MBL Research
Publisher: EA Sports
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Fight through mud-covered tracks in this intense supercross simulation. This fully licensed Supercross title features 16 stadium tracks and 24 professionals from the 1999 circuit, though drivers don't have individual traits. The dirt racing action occurs from an optional third-person perspective or behind the handlebars. It mirrors real-life Supercross, so players should slow down when taking corners to avoid wiping out and prioritize safely picking through a pack of racers instead of maintaining top speed. Riders will jockey for position against nine computer-controlled bikers in single races or kick off a proper season with points and scoring. A season consists of 16 races, with bikers acquiring points for first through 10th placements. (The payoff at the end? A singular "Congratulations!" screen.) There is also a stunt mode with specialty tracks where racers are awarded points for performing tricks. Race mode supports up to two players with split-screen, while stunt mode allows two players to take turns on the track. Almost every aspect of the difficulty – laps per race, top speed, acceleration, handling, opponent aggression, and crashes – can be tweaked in a settings menu, allowing for all kinds of gameplay variety. Thanks to a more zoomed-in perspective, the racing action feels grimy in a positive way, like being right there in the muck, and tracks even show wear and tear for longer races. There are period-specific punk rock songs for menus and play-by-play commentary for races. All sound and music can be turned up or turned off entirely, as well – a helpful feature since the commentary gets repetitive quickly. The season mode is a one-and-done feature only good for a couple of hours of play, and the racing and stunts alone don't give this one an addictive stick. Overall, a bit more depth could have made this one a Supercross classic instead of just a well-done simulation.

Reflections: My expectations for *Supercross 2000* were low since my memories of this title were of it sitting in the bargain bin. I was surprised to discover it's quite a pleasant experience, however. Learning its pedigree makes it clear why – this was the final game for MBL Research, a studio started by EA contractor Mark Lesser, who created *NHL '94* despite not being a hockey fan. Lesser later said in an interview: "As usual with me, by the time they found out I didn't know what I was doing, I did." It's hard to imagine he knew much about Supercross when building this title, but *Supercross 2000* certainly doesn't betray that. A follow-up released in 2000, *EA Sports Supercross*, scored high marks from reviewers with added outdoor tracks and more races, though it was a PlayStation exclusive. – SG





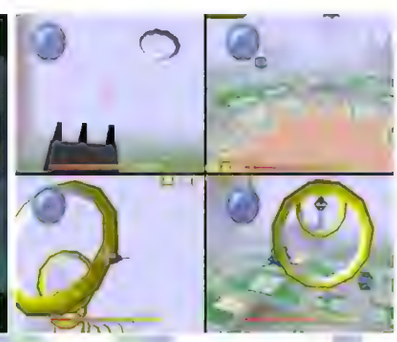
European Cartridge

Superman: The New Superman Adventures

Superman (EU)
Genre: Action
Release Date: May 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Titus France
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆

The Man of Steel fights for justice with the force of a wet noodle in this abhorrent entry in the storied hero's career. Players control Superman from a third-person perspective as he runs, flies, and punches his way through a virtual world created by his archenemies, Lex Luthor and Brainiac, to save his kidnapped friends. Controls are abysmal, with extremely loose, often unresponsive movement being the norm. Combat with foes is dull, with punches and thrown objects feeling weak (when they manage to connect) due to a poor frame rate and inconsistent physics. Superman's iconic powers, namely freezing super breath, heat vision, and x-ray vision, also feel like they have no impact and are usually unavailable thanks to being locked behind rapidly depleting meters that can only be refilled by collecting power-up tokens. The single-player campaign is divided into 17 missions, half involving tedious flying and combat challenges in a sandbox-style Metropolis that can barely be experienced due to a poor draw distance cloaking everything in fog. The other equally repetitious missions usually require racing against the clock to complete objectives such as defusing bombs and rescuing hostages. They are set in various locales from Superman's canon, including Lexcorp, the Daily Planet, and Brainiac's spaceship. These levels are bland to the point of being indistinguishable apart from bits of typography. There are also two multiplayer modes in which players can race or dogfight in a first-person perspective with up to three friends using flying vehicles piloted by Superman's enemies. However, these experiences feel like last-minute additions and have zero depth or memorability. While it is not quite broken to the point of being unplayable, every mode features a near-constant bombardment of level-ending bugs and character-based glitches that ensure constant frustration. Superman's adventure is mercifully short, but it is so uninspired, tedious, and glitchy that it sometimes feels like it will never end.

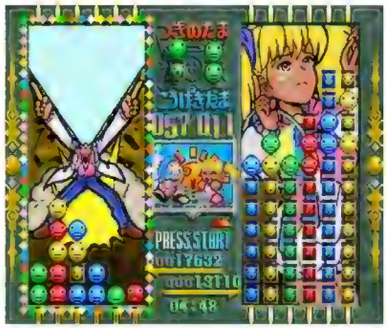
Reflections: As a lifelong fan of DC's various animated series, the most depressing part of *Superman: The New Superman Adventures* is using Bruce Timm's fantastic, instantly recognizable art style as the basis for the in-game models of Superman and his foes. These minimalistic designs should have been a cinch to translate into 3D, but this task was beyond the developers' reach. Almost equally depressing is the wasted potential that this represents. Superman is a property ripe for exploration in an interactive medium. A character with such a rich, creative history from which to draw deserves far better than a cavalcade of mediocre gameplay, half-baked ideas, and unending glitches due to a disastrous production development cycle. – CP

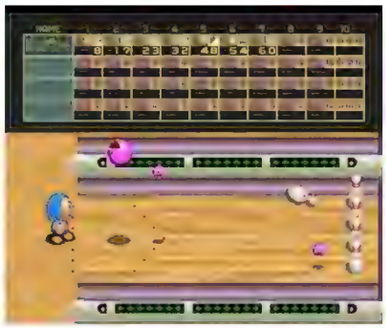


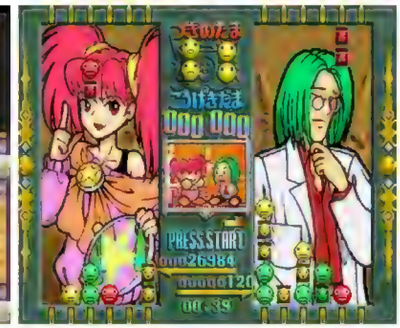
European Cartridge
Superman

Susume! Taisen Puzzle-Dama: Tōkon! Marutama Chō

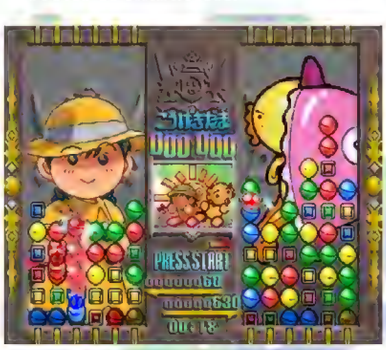
[Onward! Battle Puzzle Ball: Fighting Spirit! Round Ball Town]
Genre: Action, Puzzle
Release Date: Mar. 1998
Region: JP
Dev.: Konami Computer Entertainment Kobe
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1-4 (2 simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

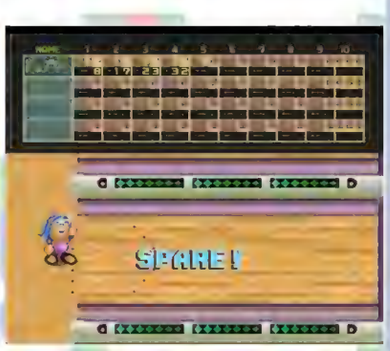




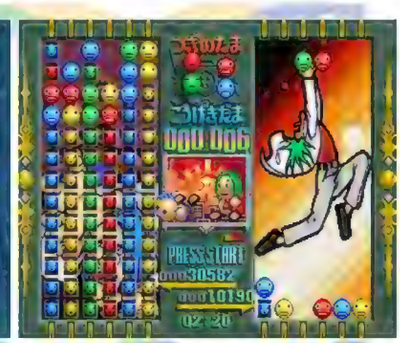


In this lively and energetic puzzle game, face off against a second player or the computer as one of thirteen colorful animated characters across three highly unique game types. In the one- or two-player Battle Puzzle Balls, colored balls drop in pairs from above into a tank and must be rotated and shifted to create matching groups of three or more. Matched groups then vanish, sending blocks to the opponent's screen. Making combo chains next to blocks breaks them open and releases the colored ball inside, often leading to cascading chains that flood the other player. Smiling white balls and grinning black ones also fall. Upon landing, the former clear blocks encasing nearby balls, much like making a match, while the latter do the opposite, entrapping them. If the stacks breach the top of the tank, it is game over. Strategy and quick reflexes are required to keep the board clear and outlast the opponent. In the second game mode, Battle Exchange Balls, an array of balls and blocks rise from the bottom of a tank. Swap positions of objects to create combos, thereby removing them and preventing the growing stack from reaching the top. On-screen characters in both puzzle modes are exceptionally animated and vocal, shouting in excitement or panic as the match plays out. The third game mode, Battle Rolling Balls, is horizontal ten-pin bowling for up to four players, with rules and scoring the same as real bowling but with the addition of "miracle balls" based on perfect timing that assault the pins with super powers like rapid fire. Adjust the speed, line up the shot, and press a button when the ball is aimed at the proper angle. These games add a lot of variety to this somewhat unusual experience, making it appropriate for just about any puzzle fan. The pulse-pounding action can get anyone hooked with its frenetic pace, colorful presentation, and amusing roster of characters.





Reflections: If you've been looking for a Puyo Puyo-style game (that's not part of the series), look no further than *Susume!* The bowling game feels a little tacked on and shallow, even with four players, but because the two puzzle modes are so deep, engaging, and involved, it is not a big deal. The wacky antics of the anime-style characters as the tide of the competition turns in their favor (or against it), the upbeat, exciting music and the fast pace make this arcade experience an absolute riot. Player beware, though, because it's pretty easy to lose several hours to this one, especially when you meant to stop after a few minutes. – CW



(Disney's) Tarzan

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

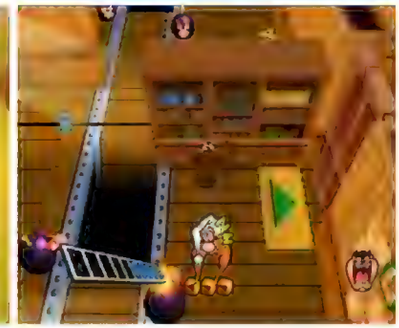
Disney's 37th animated feature film provides the inspiration for this 3D platformer. The player begins as the titular orphaned boy and gradually advances through adulthood, protecting their family in lush 3D jungle environments. Tarzan runs, jumps, collects coins (nabbing 100 awards an extra life), and throws fruit at enemies as he moves along a predetermined path toward the end of each of the 14 stages. Other weapons include knives and spears, both used for attacking in close quarters. The health bar can be replenished by finding healthy bananas. He can also swing from vines, jump on top of animals that propel him upwards, drop into chasms, and pound the ground with his fists to break crates or open new paths. These hidden alternate paths usually hold extra coins, items, weapons, and health upgrades. Finding four pencil sketches per stage unlocks bonus stages, which are typically a blast to play, and the letters T-A-R-Z-A-N in each level unlock static Story Screens from the Disney film when fully collected. Just when the left-to-right run-and-jump gameplay begins to feel monotonous, the adventure switches things up with new objectives, perspectives (such as running away from an elephant herd), and playable characters such as Jane and Terk. There is even a non-linear ship stage where the enemies are poachers, not the usual monkeys, eagles, and snakes found in the jungle levels. Sections of certain stages also require the player to "tree surf," ducking, swerving, and jumping in constant motion, which keeps proceedings interesting. Three difficulty settings are available, though any seasoned fan of the genre will want to start on Hard to get any kind of challenge. This title does not accomplish anything new or innovative, stopping it short of being a great experience, but it does succeed in being a solid platformer.

Reflections: There are essentially two ways to play *Tarzan*. One method is to run to each stage's end as quickly as possible, avoiding enemies and perfectly timing your jumps. I employed this technique during my first playthrough and quickly finished as a result. Too quickly, really. The other method is to accumulate all coins and items by exploring every inch of every level. I affectionately call this the OCD style of gameplay, and since the main campaign is so short, doing this gives you the best bang for your buck, almost as if it's the way the game was meant to be played. Plus, who doesn't like seeing "100% Complete" at the end of each stage? – JBr

European Cartridge

Taz Express

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Aug. 2000
Region: PAL
Developer: Zed Two Game Design Studio
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

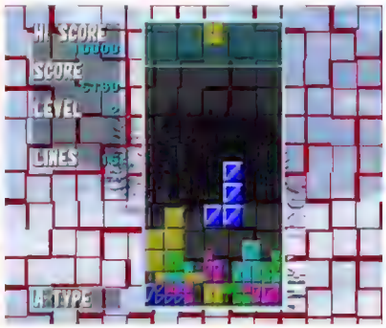


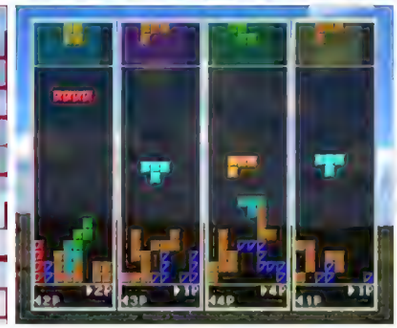
Taz has taken a job as a courier and must deliver a crate to its destination, but some villains are trying to steal it. In this top-down 3D platformer with puzzle elements, Taz must navigate hazards to carry his box to the level's exit. He can jump, run, and perform his signature spin but can do neither while holding the crate, necessitating careful routes. The box can be thrown and then caught to avoid danger, but this risks damaging the package if Taz misses its landing. There is usually a safe space where Taz may leave the crate to explore and clear paths with his whirlwind, which can destroy obstacles and enemies. The C-buttons can move the camera left and right or show the package's location, which is the chief concern. Taz has a health bar but always survives. However, the box can break, and doing so three times ends the game, though additional crate attempts can be earned by collecting all 50 golden icons in each level. Taz also has a speed meter governing jump height and spinning. Movement is momentum-based, which is cumbersome and makes platforming imprecise, yet perhaps it's appropriate for the lumbering lug. For some, Taz's whirlwind may be difficult to control, and its activation requires a perfectly straight runway to fill its meter, which is problematic in precarious spaces. Spinning is also associated with Taz's health, and although food power-ups recover it, they are not always available. Stages are themed to their star villains (who are not bosses), including Marvin the Martian, Yosemite Sam, and others. Enemies are unique to locales and include cars, aliens, robots, haunted trees, and even lesser-known characters like Beaky Buzzard. They attack Taz and his package, with some focusing on the latter if it is left alone too long. Most stages have unique scenarios and mechanics, such as giant kaiju-Taz jumping on city rooftops, catapult puzzles, opening bridges in a swamp, chasing a thief over canyons, and more. Fortunately, signposts provide tips to keep Taz on the right track. The devil himself looks and sounds excellent, and the environments are designed like the cartoons, with music fitting each setting. Completing the game multiple times unlocks items for bonus levels, like scuba gear or skates, adding replay value if players have the patience. There is a frustration factor, although this may be deliberate, and some may enjoy the dizzying cartoony challenge.

Reflections: Surprisingly, *Taz Express* was not released in North America, considering Taz's popularity. In the 1990s, I watched Looney Tunes cartoons and his newer show, *Tazmania*. Taz was my favorite because he was both ferocious and adorable. I once played a dart game at a fair specifically to win a medium Taz plush, and I also had a mini-plush Taz keychain on my backpack. However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, he became even more popular due to a cross-promotion with NASCAR's Dale Earnhardt, consequently associating Taz with edgy macho males. Being a girl, I removed mini-Taz from my backpack, but I still kept him on my dresser. – KN

Tetris 64

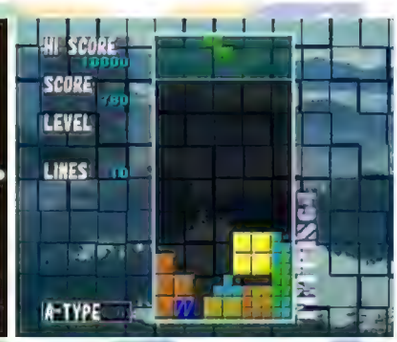
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Amtex
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Bio Sensor (optional)
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

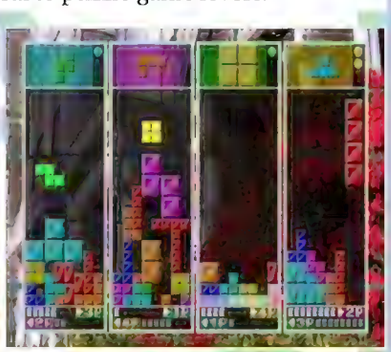




L, T, Z, and the beloved I tetrominoes are here to get minds flexing and hearts pumping in this innovative version of the classic 2D puzzle game. There are three play modes to choose from (Standard, Giga, and Bio), each supporting up to four simultaneous players. In Standard, shapes fall vertically down the playfield, and the player must rotate them to their desired position before reaching the tank's bottom. When players form horizontal lines, the lines clear and give the player points and precious space to work. Create too many gaps, and the playfield fills up. It is game over if the pieces reach the top of the tank. Creating a single line awards the player points, but maneuvering pieces to make double, triple, or quadruple (Tetris) lines awards more. In Giga mode, giant tetrominoes fall at random. If a line clear includes a giant piece, it breaks into multiple I pieces that fall into gaps below them. With proper planning, these break-off pieces cause an oh-so-satisfying chain reaction and create their own lines. The innovative Bio Tetris mode works with the optional Bio Sensor accessory that inserts into the controller's Pak slot and clips to the player's earlobe. The Bio Sensor detects the player's heart rate and determines which pieces they are given from two different groups: Group A has simpler pieces, and Group B has more complex ones. This mode introduces several new shapes, from basic squares to more advanced U and W shapes. The default setting provides the player with more complex pieces as their heart rate increases. Bio Sensor is the only mode where a five-line clear is possible. For each mode, there are three types of play. A-Type is a marathon where players can select a starting point as high as level 30, with the level (and speed) increasing every 10 lines cleared. B-Type is a stage mode where each stage has lines of random "garbage" pieces scattered in. The player must clear 25 lines to advance to the next stage. C-Type is similar to A but has garbage objects rising from the bottom of the field at certain intervals. When playing with multiple players, each person collects garbage as they clear lines and can choose when and against whom to deploy the unwanted blocks, adding a strategic element to the competition. The visuals are serviceable for a Tetris experience, if simplistic and boring. The gameplay makes this edition unique and will likely appeal to puzzle game lovers.

Reflections: The default setting for Bio Tetris has the players receiving "easy" pieces when their heart rate is slow and "hard" ones with an elevated heart rate. I may be the odd one out here, but I would rather it be the opposite. Thankfully, this can be reversed in the options menu. When I'm stressed out, the last thing I want is a bunch of difficult tetrominoes cascading down the playfield. I wish more games would have taken advantage of the Bio Sensor. Having *Doom 64*'s difficulty change on the fly depending on my heart rate would be amazing! I might have actually been able to finish *Jet Force Gemini*! – MV





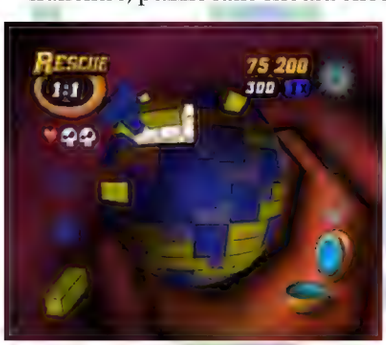
Bio Sensor

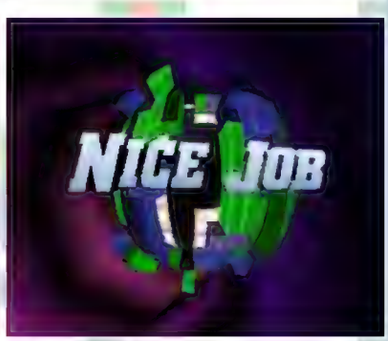
Tetrisphere

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: Aug. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: H20 Entertainment
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Drop three kinds of blocks to break into spheres in this brain-bending 3D puzzler. The bright and colorful playfield consists of layers of blocks arranged around a free-floating orb, while the droppable pieces form a queue on the bottom left corner of the screen. With fluid movement and smooth controls, players are tasked to line up a block with two or more adjacent pieces of the same type (either horizontally or vertically) to break them, guided by the piece's shadow. Players are also able to pick up and slide pieces around on the orb. Beware, though, as there are only three hearts, and one is lost each time there is a mistake in placement, which results in failing to break the blocks. If the player runs out of hearts, it is game over. A timer called the Speed Meter keeps the pressure high, though it can be increased by breaking away glowing blocks as part of the block-breaking combos. Occasionally, a Morph block appears, which players can drop onto any legal set of blocks for a break. Players managing a combo of 20 or more can earn magic, which can do things like blast away entire areas or pull blocks off the sphere. There are five available single-player modes, a hidden sixth mode (Lines), and a two-player versus mode where matches send blocks to the opponent's sphere. Solo modes come with varying goals, from racing against the clock (Time Trial) to out-matching a CPU opponent (VS CPU), digging through the sphere to uncover a picture (Hide + Seek), or rescuing a character trapped in the core (Rescue). There is also Puzzle, which features a set of 100 levels of increasing complexity with a limited number of moves. This large variety of gameplay types is a huge plus; it gives players of all types (and moods) something to anticipate. The puzzles are quite clever, and the pacing ensures there is never a feeling of getting stuck or overwhelmed. While the experience has little to do with the Tetris franchise, puzzle fans should check it out.

Reflections: There was a trend in the 1990s to stick the word "Tetris" (or the suffix -tris) onto increasingly dissimilar puzzle games to invoke the magic of the Pajitnov classic. Even official *Tetris* sequels started doing this (remember *Faces...tris III*?). Tetrisphere does not resemble a traditional Tetris game in most respects, with its three simple shapes, ability to drop pieces at will, and life bar. Putting that aside, I found this title weirdly addictive. The variety of playstyles kept this from getting stale, and I ended up pushing ever harder for that faster time and larger combo. – CW





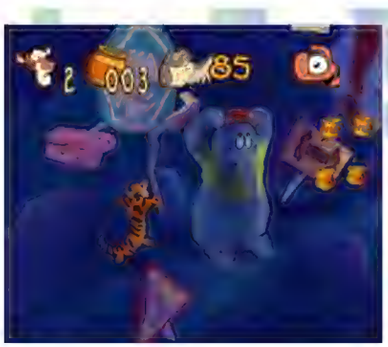
European Cartridge

(Disney Presents) Tigger's Honey Hunt

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Doki Denki Studio
Ported by: Rivage Games
Publisher: NewKidCo (NA), Ubi Soft Entertainment (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Winnie the Pooh is throwing a party and needs his pal Tigger to gather honey in this 2D platformer. Hundred Acre Woods residents abound in all their cuteness to guide Tigger through six stages in search of honey pots, pictures, and lost items. Collecting all honey pots, pictures, or beating the simple time trials in each stage will unlock gallery photos but nothing more. Tigger hops across treetops, the backs of turtles, ice floes, and through caves in search of each last honey pot. New bouncing abilities are gained along his quest: the ability to flap his arms to gain horizontal distance after a jump and an accordion-like bounce to reach high ledges. The aesthetic matches the soft, warm feeling of the Winnie the Pooh franchise, so even the cave sections or the nighttime stage don't feel scary but rather like a familiar place. Enemies are few and far between, including bees buzzing, crows swooping lazily about, and Heffalumps and Woozles popping in near the end to add something more surreal. The animations for Tigger, Pooh, Rabbit, and the rest all look bold and expressive, adding personality to a platformer that otherwise lacks full voice acting other than Tigger's damage and jumping yelps and simple sounds from other creatures. The sound quality is pleasant and peaceful, with satisfying bouncing sounds for all of Tigger's jumps. It's a shame that the controls are uneven, as they're either incredibly basic or require pixel-perfect timing. For example, using the high bounce and then trying to flap Tigger's arms for distance only sometimes works, and there is a roadblock near the end that requires perfection to land. There are no bosses or unique challenges, only sections that feel somehow undercooked to the point that some kids may be unable to complete them. Along the adventure are three bonus games, those being Rabbit Says (a Simon Says-type game), Pooh Sticks (tossing a stick into the river to win a race), and Paper, Scissors, Owl (Rock, Paper, Scissors against Owl). Each mini-game can also be played from the main menu with a second player, ultimately a cute diversion to share with friends and family. Adults may not pay Tigger much attention, but this is indeed a faithful representation of the beloved stuffed critters for kids. Questionable jumps aside, Tigger is warm, loveable, and worth the RSVP.

Reflections: Why voice acting was absent here is a great mystery. The usual voice cast is in the PlayStation and Windows versions of *Tigger's Honey Hunt*, making the N64 version arguably the inferior option. Considering the target age group, it feels like a curious omission and becomes more baffling when the challenge spikes for individual jumps. The struggle to make that final sideways high bounce took significant time in a stage that would typically require less than two to complete. That's coming from a jaded adult, but the kid in my heart who loves Tigger, Eeyore, and Pooh Bear still wants to hop back in and search every nook and cranny to fill out the entire photo album just because I can. In the meantime, "ta-ta for now." – CPr



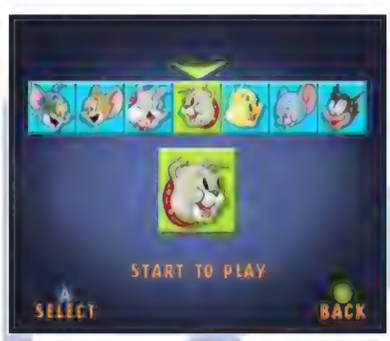
European Cartridge

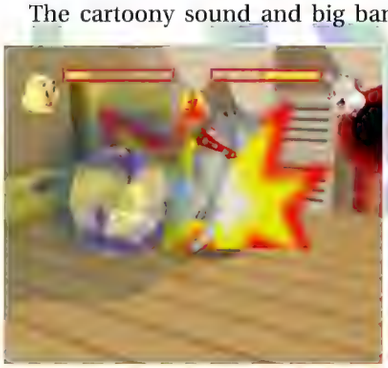
Tom and Jerry in Fists of Furry

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: VIS Interactive
Publisher: NewKidCo (NA), Ubi Soft Entertainment (PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Everyone's favorite cat and mouse duo are back with a fur-ocious 3D arena-style fighting game. Smash, crash, and bash opponents with fists, claws, or anything else lying around! Single Player mode features one-on-one CPU battles against each of the other six characters until facing a giant Jerry (best of one, three, or five rounds), a friend can be fought in Versus mode, or a four-character squad can be assembled for the unlockable Team mode. Team mode is similar to Versus mode, but the characters battle sequentially. Only Tom and Jerry start unlocked, but completing Single Player mode unlocks additional characters, along with Team mode, new levels, and hidden cheats. Controls are intuitive and simple: B is used for attacks (punches, kicks, and throwing/hitting objects), A jumps (and double jumps), C-buttons pick up items and can catch objects thrown at the character, and L/R ducks. Jumping around feels floaty at first, but this proves handy when timing mid-air multi-jumps to whack an opponent from up high. Character strengths and weaknesses vary based on size; larger characters like Tom, Butch, and Spike move slower but are stronger, while smaller characters like Jerry, Tyke, Tuffy, and Quacker move faster but are weaker. Like the cartoon, clever traps and various interactive objects unique to the setting fill the level, such as food and utensils in the kitchen or potions and bones in the evil laboratory. These objects are indicated with a round cursor and can be picked up, thrown, used to whack opponents, or charged up for considerable damage. Besides health pick-ups (sometimes dropped when hit), mystery power-ups will appear in the stages that randomly assign either Invisibility (thrown items no longer auto-target), Double Damage, Invincibility, or contagious Measles (touch the opponent to pass it on!). The presentation is fantastic, with each level modeled in the art style of the show, like a living room, backyard, cruise ship deck, and more. The level designs are colorful but not overly detailed. Objects are large and comical and make for irresistible weaponry. Character animations are smooth and reflect the show's cartoony atmosphere. The cartoony sound and big band music are above average and complement the presentation. It's great fun to see and hear all the different reactions of the characters when hit with different types of objects. The overall experience is short, but finishing it on the hardest difficulty may take some effort. While geared towards a younger crowd, this fighter also works well as a quick pick-up-and-play for the young at heart.

Reflections: I remember watching Tom and Jerry cartoons as a kid and playing *Tom and Jerry in Fists of Furry* for the first time brought it all back. I find it funny to be able to see Tom win against Jerry finally. That poor cat never seems to get his fair shake. I am disappointed that there isn't a four-player multiplayer option, though, as *Fists of Furry* would have been a perfect fit for the sort of madcap melee that would ensue, presumably in a dust cloud of hands and hammers. A sequel would follow: *Tom and Jerry in War of the Whiskers* was released for the GameCube, PlayStation 2, and Xbox in 2002. – BC

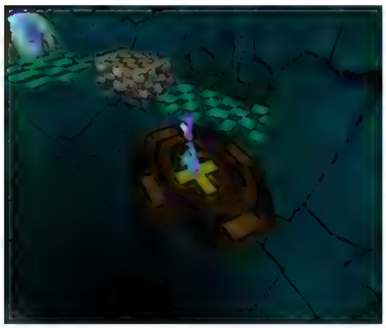


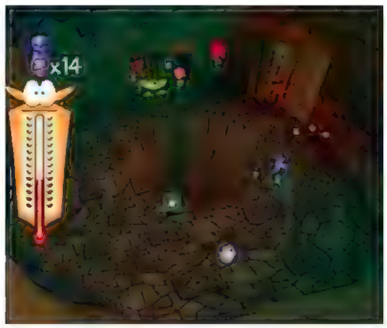


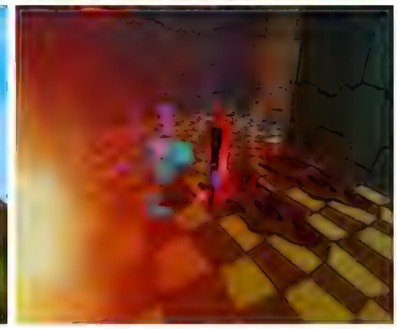
European Cartridge

Tonic Trouble

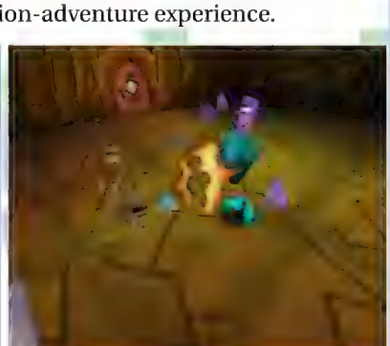
Genre: Action-Adventure
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ubi Soft Montreal
Publisher: Ubi Soft Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆



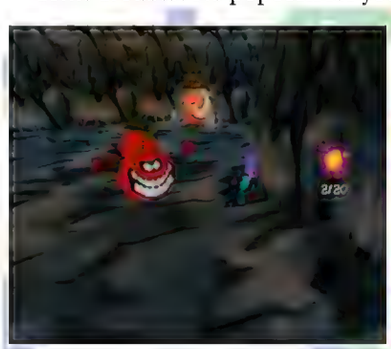




When space janitor Ed drops a can of unidentified liquid onto Earth, everything from vegetables to toasters mutates into horrible beasts, with Viking Grögh the Hellish leading their evil rampage. With help from Suzy, the Doc, and Agent Xyz, Ed embarks on a journey to save the planet. The 3D adventure takes place from a third-person perspective with a movable camera that can temporarily swap to a first-person view. Limbless hero Ed starts with a basic jump, sidestep, and ledge grab but soon upgrades his arsenal to include a stick, a peashooter, a pogo stick, a bowtie that enables limited flight, and extra health in the form of thermometer points. Special powers can be activated at certain terminals, each enabling a strong but short-lived ability. Find a popcorn machine, for example, and Ed will transform into Super Ed, a beefed-up muscleman who can smack enemies with meaty fists. Stages are structured around a centralized hub level with exits to a dozen themed areas (Vegetable HQ, Pyramid, Canyon, Crazy Tower, etc.) In each one, Ed will hop across platforms, avoid attacks, and fight small bosses, all while gathering items to take back to Doc at the hub, who will then create a new ability that will allow Ed to access new stages. Most of the gameplay is centered around collecting items, platforming, and action sequences (skiing down a slope at high speed). There is the occasional bit of simplified combat, often consisting of a few quick smacks from Ed's stick or a peashooter sniper shot, along with rudimentary puzzles that involve moving boxes or pressing buttons to activate or destroy environmental obstacles. The variety of actions performed with Ed's upgrades keeps the player wondering what will happen next. (That stick can control platforms, unlock doors, and more!) Sadly, much challenge is never provided, so this sense of discovery is the only thing driving the action forward. Worse still, the physics lacks heft – sliding a huge metal box has about as much impact as pushing a paperclip, and Ed always feels floaty, like a feather fighting against a fan. Despite these issues, everything combines to present a funny, varied, slightly above-average action-adventure experience.



Reflections: One look at the limbless Ed, and you'll know Michel Ancel, creator of the Rayman series, had a hand in the design. *Tonic Trouble* was actually released just a few years after the first Rayman game, and it shares a similar sense of humor and cartoonish visual design. There is also a cheeky connection to the real world: Newman's Own logos appear on the popcorn dispensers. Buyers of the Windows version of *Tonic Trouble* received a free pack of popcorn, and certain retail popcorn boxes shipped with $10 coupons for the game. Those who bought the N64 or Game Boy Color versions of *Tonic Trouble*? No popcorn for you. – JBa



European Cartridge

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater

Tony Hawk's Skateboarding (EU)
Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Neversoft Entertainment
Ported by: Edge of Reality
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆

Ready for a day of tail sliding, kickflipping, and catching huge air? Grab a board and take to the pavement! No posers are allowed in this third-person 3D skating adventure. It's just the player, a choice of ten real-life skateboarding pros to command, and a preferred deck, trucks, and wheels. Once properly equipped, there's the option to start Career Mode, where the player travels throughout the USA, showing off their skills to score points and progress by accomplishing various challenges. Choose to play from a selection of actual professional skateboarders, including Chad Muska, Elissa Steamer, and the "Bird Man" himself, Tony Hawk. Or, take on a fellow thrasher in a game of HORSE, Trick Attack, or Graffiti Mode for split-screen, two-player fun. Hop on a board and maneuver around each course using the Control Stick for direction and the C buttons to perform tricks. The controls may require a little time to get the hang of, but once players adapt, they'll be the gnarliest kid on the block. Maintaining speed and momentum and having a big bag of tricks on hand will earn the envy of all their fellow skateboarding professionals. The journey will take players from suburban schoolyards in Florida to sprawling shopping malls in New York. Wherever four urethane wheels meet the ground, players will find a never-ending assortment of obstacles just ripe for shredding! Ledges, rails, ramps, and stairs all wait to be conquered, but landing properly for a clean roll away is vital, as real physics does apply (wiping out means zero points and zero street cred). Chain together as many maneuvers as possible by sliding along winding handrails, pulling massive aerials, and spinning to a dizzying degree, scoring enormous points for skill and creativity. Completing each of the five goals in every stage earns a videotape; players are charged with reaching specific scores, finding particular obstacles, and gathering letters to form the word SKATE. Collecting tapes in each level unlocks new equipment and locations to shred and explore. Bands that spring straight from the skateboarding subculture provide the tunes, including Dead Kennedys, The Vandals, and Primus. Once the controls have been mastered, there is a satisfying blend of skill and exploration to be had, with plenty of fun challenges to be attempted along the way.

Reflections: *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* was one of the first skateboarding games to be widely accepted, or at least not broadly browbeat, by actual skateboarders, a notoriously critical lot. I was one for many years, so I know first-hand. Skateboarding games for home video game consoles before this title's debut were criminally awful, all of them the target of much ridicule. But this title kept it real by allowing gamers to perform authentic, modern skateboarding tricks while playing as relevant skating professionals. Finally, as a person who has ridden a skateboard for decades, let me take this opportunity to get one other very important thing off my chest: for the love of God, it's half-pipe, not half-pike. – DM

European Cartridge
Tony Hawk's Skateboarding

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 2001
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Neversoft Entertainment
Ported by: Edge of Reality
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Imagine racing down a street, rapidly gathering speed, weaving in and out of traffic. Tattered shoes cling for dear life to a wobbling board as velocity increases! The shimmering urban terrain is ripe for the taking, but watch out for skateboard-hating cops, raging motorists, and clueless pedestrians. Sounds a little too dangerous? Then put down the board and grab a controller! In Career Mode, players can select from legendary professional skaters, including Steve Caballero and Eric Koston. Through third-person 3D action, players can thrash through a colorful assortment of levels around the globe, from Mexico to Montana. The D-pad, A button, and C-buttons are used to grind, slide, ollie, manual, wallride, boneless, and flip the board in many ways. Players can also execute the entire catalog of tricks via "switch stance." This ride is fun and fluid, with precise and pleasing controls. Collecting cash in levels can be used to improve stats, buy new tricks, and upgrade equipment. Chaining together difficult maneuvers and combinations can achieve maximum points, which equals loads of cash. Big bucks can also be earned by accomplishing specific goals in each level, such as locating certain objects, finding hidden tapes, or collecting all the letters to spell S-K-A-T-E. Scoring big points and accomplishing goals while steering clear of danger will unlock new levels. Improving stats in categories like speed, hangtime, and rail balance can amplify abilities. If no selectable pro skateboarders seem appealing, a fully customized skater can be created, choosing their hometown, age, style, stance, hair, and clothing. In the spirit of building an experience Burger King style, Park Editor allows the creation of a custom skatepark from scratch by choosing all the obstacles, like quarter pipes, benches, and flat bars, and their layout. Players can hit the streets with a friend and challenge them to a game of HORSE, Trick Attack, or Grafitti. Guitars, drums, and vocals are delivered by Anthrax, Rage Against the Machine, and other musical acts that fit the skate culture bill. The graphics are a little lackluster, with bland textures and a short render distance for the fast-paced action, but that is quickly forgotten once the addictive gameplay takes over. The enormous bag of tricks and infinite potential for combinations will surely get most players hungry for a plate of scorching-hot skateboarding action.

Reflections: There is a special kind of joy waiting for those of us who have been involved in skateboarding's subculture through the years when we play *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*. That is the giddy sense of satisfaction from seeing how some of our real-life skateboarding heroes are portrayed in this alternate world. There's just something nonsensically fun about seeing a well-known skating professional who is married to a very specific type of terrain and style of skateboarding suddenly thrust into realms of the sport where they would never delve in real life! For example, Rodney Mullen is renowned for a very particular flavor of creative freestyle skateboarding on areas of flat ground. He is slow-moving, incredibly technical, and never involves speed or big obstacles, so to play as him racing at Mach 3 speed while pulling 16-foot Judo Airs above the lip of a massive 12-foot half-pipe is simply ridiculous and so magical. It encourages you to keep playing and exploring all the insane but welcome possibilities... big smiles for everyone. – DM

European Cartridge

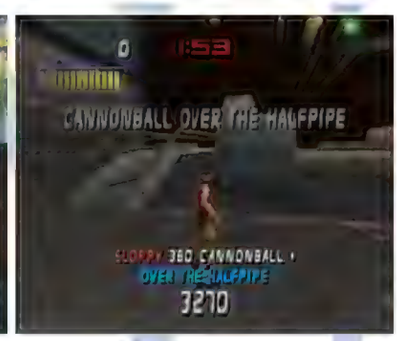
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Aug. 2002
Region: NA
Developer: Neversoft Entertainment
Ported by: Edge of Reality
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

Bust out the skateboard to grind, Ollie, and flip with Tony Hawk and 12 of his peers, like Bam Margera, Kareem Campbell, and Rodney Mullen, in this third-person skateboarding trick-fest. These skaters can each compete in the primary Career mode, where players have two minutes to knock out up to 10 goals in a level. Three of these goals are always progressively higher pre-set scores to achieve, while other objectives range to the more eccentric, like grinding across the entire wingspan of a model plane in an airport. There are nine stages, three of them consisting of tournament levels to rack up as many points in three heats to earn a top-three medal. By completing the career mode, the competitors gain stat points and noticeably improve their skating abilities. The skaters can be maneuvered with either the Control Stick or D-pad, while the four C-buttons have preferred access to performing grinds, flips, jumps, and grab tricks. Combining those buttons with directional sequences opens the trick playbook and increases a special meter that enables score-boosting tricks. For example, when playing as Chad Muska pressing RIGHT, DOWN, C-up when about to land a grind, Muska performs his Handstand Nosegrind special. It would be wise to avoid using the Control Stick, as the handling feels slightly off and gives the impression of being more prone to wipeouts, but maneuvering with the D-pad has a better sense of control. Mastering the timing of the manual and revert tricks makes it possible to link flip and grind tricks together for massive combos. Successfully executing these combo strings is incredibly rewarding and makes putting in the practice to improve worth the effort!

There is a nice variety of extra features for further replays, like a creation suite to design a skater or skatepark from scratch and a two-player mode. Two friends can compete in options like Trick Attack for a high score, the Graffiti mode to see who can score higher on most parts of a level, or the self-explanatory Tag and HORSE modes. The mammoth stages and character designs look good in motion but more washed out up close. The soundtrack has minor issues since it consists of only seven songs that quickly repeat and some odd remixes, specifically the take on Motörhead's "Ace of Spades." Overall, this skateboarding escapade excels with addicting mechanics to master, creation features and unlockable content for replay value, and that irresistible "one more run" feeling that all add up to an outstanding experience.

Reflections: *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* marked the sole 2002 game for the Nintendo 64 and the final officially licensed N64 release. At least the N64's swan song was a true banger. This sequel added the last missing puzzle piece of the revert trick to open up countless combo possibilities. One of my favorite gaming moments is nailing my first one-million-point combo in the Tony Hawk games, and the successful use of reverts and manuals makes that possible! The cross-promotional hidden character for this Tony Hawk game is fan-favorite X-Man, Wolverine, but you must work hard to unlock him by clearing every single gap across all stages. If you have access to the disc versions on other platforms (GameCube, PS2, Xbox, etc.), I would recommend those instead because they have triple the number of soundtrack songs, all in superior quality compared to some of these bizarre N64 remixes. – DK



Top Gear Hyper-Bike

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Snowblind Studios
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

The Top Gear franchise ventures into two-wheel territory! This gravity-defying racer has 16 motorcycles and dirt bikes to unlock, featuring real-world models from Kawasaki, Honda, and more. Each features different handling, top speed, acceleration attributes, and customizable colors for the bikes and their riders. The camera can be set at the default, behind-the-rider view, or first-person handlebars perspective. Choosing a dirt bike will set courses to Motocross style, focusing on high-flying leaps, tricks, and off-road exploration. Going with a street bike sets Street racing style, which is all about staying on the tracks, mastering sharp turns, and achieving high speeds on the straightaways. Nitro Boosts are available to collect and use, while immediate-use Nitro Bursts are also found on courses. Single Race mode allows up to two players to compete against the computer and provides freedom of exploration (no time limits) to find shortcuts and extra Nitro. In Championship mode, compete through multiple races, modes, and tracks to unlock faster bikes and new courses to use in other modes. Trick Attack and Time Attack are solo endeavors designed to help pull off gnarly aerial tricks and memorize courses to achieve the best times. Plugging in an Expansion Pak allows players to take advantage of the Track Editor, which lets them create tracks and challenge friends to beat their courses. Different racing experiences are presented over nicely rendered indoor tracks, cityscapes, and countrysides, including Celtic coasts and Egyptian ruins. The camera gives a clear view of the immediate course ahead, even if the textures are as muddy as the course. Staying on the track while achieving top speeds is extremely tricky; this is especially noticeable in Street races, where the courses often have boundary walls to bounce against when losing control of the bike. Motocross races are a bit more forgiving of mistakes with their wide-open spaces, making it easier to get back on track without losing much time. Sensitive control concerns don't significantly detract from the depth of the experience, allowing players to stay engaged and entertained with loads of wild stunts and plenty of intense races.

Reflections: As a massive fan of the Road Rash series, I was a little disappointed when I began playing *Top Gear Hyper-Bike* and realized I couldn't pull up alongside another biker, whip out my chain, and slap him into the side of a hill. Interactions with other riders result in minimal conflict or drama, acting more as nuisances on your quest to catch the biggest air or discover the fastest path. However, there is so much to enjoy here that delight quickly overshadows my disappointment. I still would have loved to see a dedicated battle mode, but the racing and stunt action here was more than enough to keep me glued to the screen. – JBr

European Cartridge

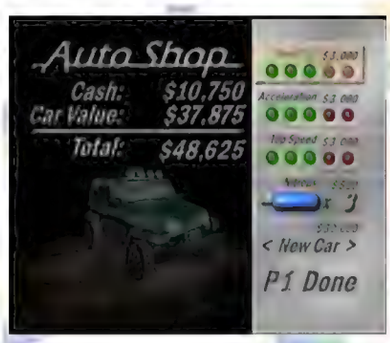
Japanese Cartridge

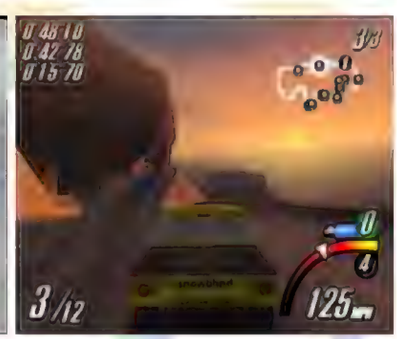
Top Gear Overdrive

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Snowblind Studios
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Feel the pulsing energy of 10 roaring rides capable of unleashing turbo power-ups and leaping dangerously high ramps in this thrill-seeking outdoor racer. The action transpires from first- or third-person perspectives across five stages of paved roads that cut through cascading farmlands, bog-dominated swamps, and the heart of a city's downtown. Championship mode can be played alone or with up to four players and is primarily used to unlock new cars by completing seasons. As players progress through six seasons of races in Championship mode, they will pile up cash winnings to upgrade their car's handling, acceleration, braking, and top speed attributes before ultimately trading it in for a faster ride. The fastest of these cars pump so much horsepower that they become prone to spiraling into a boundary and exploding with the slightest nudge on the analog stick. The steering for all vehicles is pretty sensitive, so expect upcoming corners to become suspenseful, teeth-grinding encounters. Drivers start each race with three nitro boosts, but additional boosts and cash bonuses are available on the track. Each course has a few shortcuts and alternate paths worth exploring that pay off significantly; hitting one per lap while avoiding crashes almost guarantees finishing in the top four. Mirrored versions of these tracks can also be unlocked with additional weather conditions like rain and snow. Players must alter their steering strategies when the weather isn't cooperating. Versus mode allows players to choose a track and go solo against 11 AI opponents or invite three human opponents to indulge in split-screen play. Graphically, the cars look appropriately souped-up for the swift-paced racing, and the six metal jams from the band Grindstone provide a fitting soundtrack for the mayhem. While the action does culminate in some high-speed thrills, the lack of stages and jerky steering ultimately become too unruly to tolerate and derail it from hanging with the front of the pack.

Reflections: Despite its flaws, *Top Gear Overdrive* is a decent pit stop from the intense dirt tracks of the Top Gear Rally games. One of my favorite features is the cheat codes you can enter from the main menu. There is a sixth bonus stage, IN SPACE, which you can play in Versus mode after entering the right code, and it's worth trying out, for sure. You can also unlock new stages and cars with these cheats, including cheeky vehicles like a gigantic hot dog, an oversized taco, and the "Big N" Nintendo 64 logo with a set of attached wheels. – DK





European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Top Gear Rally

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Oct. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Boss Game Studios
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), Kemco (JP, PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Experience the adrenaline rush that only off-road rally racing can provide in first- or third-person. Nine unlicensed rally cars are available from the start. Players can tinker with them before each race to change transmission types, tires, suspension, and handling, all of which impact the racing. For example, certain suspensions will have a springy bounce coming off a jump, and handling types ease drifting through muddy corners. The racing plays out quite smoothly while navigating through stages, and many fun visual details are visible, like construction machinery, hot air balloons, and ground-level flying biplanes. The main Championship mode pits 19 opponents against each other, with the player starting at the rear. Each course has an alternate path to keep an eye out for to shave precious seconds off lap times, and weather conditions set by the player before the race (rain, fog, snow) can help or hinder progress. Points are awarded based on finishing position and carry over to the season's next race. There are six seasons; winning them all will unlock extra cars and stages. Sadly, Championship mode only contains four tracks, with the final fifth stage unlockable after winning each race in all six seasons. Arcade mode pits the player against one computer- or player-controlled driver. Each race has several timed checkpoints per lap, so players will instantly lose if they fail to reach one before the timer hits zero. Practice and Time Trial round out the main modes and offer a way to practice courses and work on lap records, respectively. If racing is getting tiring, enter the Paint Shop to alter a car's color, decals, and text that can appear on it. The Shop has many powerful features, including multiple layers and the ability to morph designs together. The synth-flavored soundtrack does not seem to fit, but mileage may vary. The racing action, car options, and decent variety of modes add up to an attractive overall package. Only the severe lack of stages holds this thrilling racer back from the front of the pack.

Reflections: It is an understatement to note how the Paint Shop in *Top Gear Rally* was ahead of its time. This level of customization did not become common until 2005, when the first *Forza Motorsport* on Xbox was released. There are also some crafty cheats the developers included to experiment with, like turning your car into a beach ball, driving a milk truck, transforming the scenery into rainbows, or even downgrading to 32-bit graphics for lower-quality textures and rougher animations. Do not attempt the rainbow cheat for more than five seconds, though, or you'll risk going blind. – DK

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Top Gear Rally 2

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Saffire
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Championship winnings await in this exciting first- or third-person dirt track rally racer. A wide variety of course environments is available, with rugged terrain that only licensed cars from Mitsubishi, Subaru, and Toyota can handle. In the primary Championship mode, tracks are littered with boulders to weave around and streams of water to dash through to avoid taking damage and severely impairing steering and acceleration. Vehicles start off a little rugged to control and are prone to being too sensitive and relatively easy to spin out, but upgrading their parts in this mode makes a noticeable improvement to their handling. Each driver's final time decides the finishing position, not the order in which cars cross the line, so it may be best to focus on the courses and ignore competitors. As wins and earnings are accrued, up to 14 other sponsors will reach out with offers to join their team, opening up new and better-performing cars players can use to win more advanced courses. Each sponsor's vehicle starts with an array of unreliable beginner parts, like tires that frequently flatten, overheating engines, and suspensions prone to blowing out. Players may habituate repeating earlier races for additional cash to buy better parts and remain competitive in more demanding stages. Versus mode is more straightforward and allows up to four players to pick a vehicle and hop right into a race. All drivers begin simultaneously in Versus mode, compared to the staggered starts in Championship. Thus, the finishing position is determined by the order in which the finishing line is crossed, creating a slightly more intuitive (and competitive) racing environment. Most cars have uniquely voiced co-drivers announcing the severity of upcoming turns. The visuals dazzle with mud that stains vehicles and splashy terrain kicking up all over. Better performance in the Championship mode even unlocks pre-made decal designs for the cars to give them some extra pop. Forgettable rock songs dominate the in-game soundtrack. In contrast, the menu music features a distinct funk style that is the polar opposite. A fun racing time is buried here, but it requires a lot of work to win Championship races repeatedly to stay competitive.

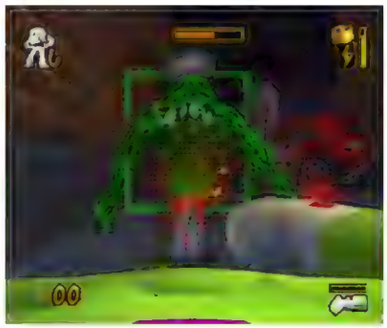
Reflections: I had a consistent love/hate relationship with Championship mode. Feeling each vehicle become more powerful is extremely satisfying, but the grinding process is exhausting and ultimately detracts from the fun factor. Fortunately, like its predecessor, *Top Gear Rally 2* has cheat codes for fun extras like oversized wheels and racing in a toxic mist. Oddly, a code is required to play with the Expansion Pak's high-resolution graphics option. These unlocked textures add a nice dose of polish but at the cost of a bigger border around the screen to maintain crisp animation. – DK

European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

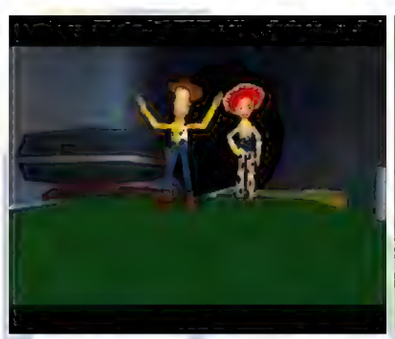
(Disney•Pixar) Toy Story 2: Buzz Lightyear to the Rescue!

Genre: Action-Platformer
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Traveller's Tales
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



A greedy toy collector has kidnapped Woody, and it's up to Buzz Lightyear to save him. This third-person adventure spans 15 levels that take players through the film's plot, told via still shots directly out of the movie. Work through levels one at a time, collecting Pizza Planet Tokens and fighting an occasional boss to progress. Buzz can jump, stomp, hit enemies with his laser, and switch into a first-person view for more precise aiming (his reflection even shows up in the visor like in the first movie). He can also attack with a spin of his wings and get an extra boost from them when jumping. When jumping toward them, Buzz automatically grabs onto ropes, poles, zip lines, and ledges. Whether he does this or not can be frustratingly inconsistent, especially if a miss sends him to the ground after a long climb. Ten levels feature everyday environments, like Andy's house, a toy store, or neighborhood and city streets. From the perspective of a toy, though, these environments are vast, open sandboxes full of challenges and opportunities to explore. The player will hop, climb, and use environmental objects to propel around each stage, collecting the five tokens found in each. These are needed to access the next stage; gather them by helping fellow toys find lost friends, collecting coins for Hamm, competing in timed challenges, solving puzzles, or facing off against toys that have gone afoul. The other five stages are full-on boss fights, though defeating them requires little more than relentlessly attacking until the foe falls over. The 3D platforming action is a little frustrating since the camera sometimes refuses to cooperate, especially in a corner or tight space. The problem persists even if setting the camera to manual and aiming it with the C-buttons. There are also struggles with slowdown and short draw distances, resulting in a distracting object pop-in effect. What ultimately results is an enjoyable 3D platformer with some noticeable hiccups.

Reflections: I have played the PlayStation version of *Toy Story 2* quite a bit, and comparing my memories of that version with the N64 experience was enjoyable. I especially appreciate how creative *Toy Story 2*'s level design is. An otherwise typical suburban home suddenly becomes a massive playground to run around, explore, and experiment with, all because of the perspective. This view ends up making something as simple as reaching the top of a bookcase an adventure in its own right. You can never forget that you're playing as a toy – that it runs with this idea makes it a unique experience. *Toy Story 2* was not without controversy. Soon after its release, a protest was held outside Activision's Santa Monica offices due to a mini-boss character perceived as an offensive stereotype of a Mexican bandit. The character was changed to a generic cowboy for a future 1.1 cartridge revision in North America. – NT



European Cartridge

Transformers: Beast Wars Transmetals

Transformers: Beast Wars Metals 64 (JP)
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: July 2000
Region: JP, NA
Developer: Locomotive, GenAzea
Publisher: BAM! Entertainment (NA), TAKARA (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak (JP)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆

In the far future, the Transformers of Cybertron have evolved into semi-organic machines able to mimic creatures on a primitive planet. Here, the heroic Maximals must stop the evil Predacons from taking their Energon resources. This one-on-one 3D fighter features eight characters (plus five hidden ones) from the television series, including Rattrap, Cheetor, Waspinator, and Megatron. It renders them accurately to the show and includes audio clips from their TV counterpart's voice actors. Unfortunately, there is no story mode, leaving only quick arcade-style fighting bouts for players to experience. The point of view stays fixed at the center of a circular arena, pivoting to keep an eye on the action and making everything feel like it takes place on a turntable. Controlling fighters should be simple, but this odd perspective overcomplicates things. Movement occurs with the Control Stick, Z jumps, and the C-buttons attack and block. The Transformer's current form influences the types of attacks performed. Using A or B transforms into different modes: beast, vehicle, and robot (the default). In robot mode, most attacks are projectiles like guns and bombs, while beast mode has more close-range attacks, and vehicle mode is for fast movement. Each character has unique moves and features, like Optimus Primal's Drumming Fury or Cheetor's speed. Attacking depletes an Energon gauge, so players must strategize before taking action – a frustrating task when the world is spinning. The backgrounds are blurry with minimal depth and frequently repeating textures, the music is unremarkable, and the menus are straightforward but bereft of personality. There is a two-player versus mode and a team mode where players select groups of transformers to fight one at a time. Perhaps to pad things out, there is a bonus menu with minigames and a "Kids" mode, which is arcade mode with super-deformed (or "chibi") characters. Mini-games are simple and repetitive, with a race where players quickly mash alternating buttons, a quick-draw duel, and one where the object is to collect discs. The "Toys" option is the most enjoyable, offering a view of the character models and descriptions. Despite these inclusions, even ardent fans of the animated show or franchise will find little to enjoy, leaving it one for only die-hard collectors to worry over.

Reflections: Although I wouldn't admit it then, I watched *Beast Wars: Transformers*. I was too old for it, but television airings were limited to our antenna, and pickings could be slim. I remember Cheetor best, maybe because he was the least ugly? *Beast Wars*' CGI isn't just bad in hindsight; it was bad then, too, although we Fox viewers didn't know it was a couple of years old before coming to the network. The show might have a nostalgic charm for fans, but this won't. *Beast Wars Transmetals* was a Blockbuster exclusive, and it's completely unlike its more robust PlayStation counterpart, making the N64 cart a little tougher to come across. It also has a distinct variance between its Japanese and North American N64 releases; the Japanese version offers Transfer Pak support with the Game Boy Color title *Kettō Transformers Beast Wars: Beast Senshi Saikyō Ketteisen*, which gives stat bonuses to characters as well as access to an unlockable character. – KN

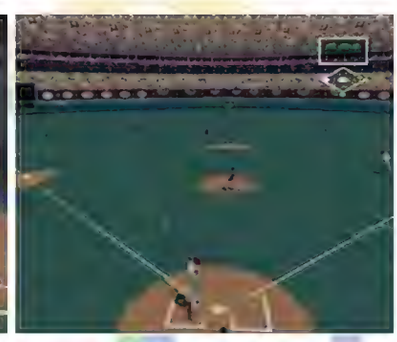
Japanese Cartridge
Transformers: Beast Wars Metals 64

Triple Play 2000

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Electronic Arts Canada
Ported by: Treyarch Invention
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆

Take the diamond in the only release of this annual baseball series to hit the Nintendo 64. All 30 franchises in this MLB-licensed title are playable in exhibition games, seasons, playoffs, and even a home run derby. At-bats are viewed from behind home plate but shift to an angled top-down view upon a batted ball, and the camera sits behind the mound when pitching. Throws can be aimed in any direction, but identifying a pitch's destination is more guesswork than science, as the cursor that shows where the ball will go appears only after throwing it. The trajectory can be altered after release, even for straighter pitches like fastballs. Batting involves a quick decision to decide if the pitch will be a strike or ball, followed by a swing controlled by a single button press. It is basic, but the realistic batted-ball physics delivers what someone would expect each time when making contact. AI defenders either dive for balls they have no chance of fielding or refuse to engage comically close balls. User-controlled defense is better, although fielding fly balls will necessitate moving a fielder precisely to the center of the ball's landing zone, a task that may prove frustrating for new players. The AI baserunners foolishly sprint upon contact in unwise situations, resulting in many vexing outs. Players are not always based on their MLBPA counterparts, as their skin tones don't always match, nor do their heights. The music is one bright spot, with a wide selection of walk-up tunes for home team batters that add character to players, particularly if following their progress across a long season. The awful commentary features an announcer who delivers even the mildest of updates with a shrieking enthusiasm that sounds like a parody of the real thing. There are more moments of confusion and frustration than genuine sports action and little in the way of gameplay innovations to inspire players to keep playing. For those expecting World Series glory from this title, prepare for an experience akin to a bottom-of-the-standings finish.

Reflections: *Triple Play 2000* is a middling game at best, made worse by the fact that it is a port of superior versions on the PlayStation and PC. Those versions feature full-motion video with real MLB footage, crisp graphics, marvelous sound effects, and several features and options that aren't included in this pale imitation. It would be hard to recommend *Triple Play 2000* as a standalone title, but the existence of two superior versions outside the N64 makes it impossible. – JM



Turok 2: Seeds of Evil

Violence Killer: Turok New Generation (JP)
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Shattering the Chronoscepter has unleashed a malevolent evil, the sinister Primagen, into the world in this first-person-shooter follow-up to the original. In the single-player campaign, Turok must tear through six stages in his fight against them. This time, wield an arsenal of 24 available weapons, including Turok's trademark bow, the shotgun, and more esoteric weapons like the Firestorm and the Nuke. Turok can even climb aboard the massive, artillery-bearing Styracosaurus to rain devastation. Sentinels, Deadmen, and Primagen Troopers will all face rapid explosive death via the Plasma Rifle or the skull-rending pain of the Cerebral Bore. In addition to collecting the keys to unlock the final boss, players must pursue multiple objectives that vary by level, including rescuing children, banishing Sisters of Despair, and defending the energy totems. Despite levels being accessed via a hub world, players must complete all objectives in the prior level before continuing. Turok will also need to collect five Sacred Talismans, which grant the player abilities, such as Leap of Faith, which will launch Turok into the air, and Eyes of Truth, which reveal hidden spirit paths, encouraging backtracking through previous levels. The levels themselves are sprawling and varied, consisting of swamps, ancient cities, insect hives, and starships, all providing vast spaces to explore. Graphics impress with its variety of detailed environments and lengthy draw distance, though visuals do suffer from a slowdown in places, even with the optional Expansion Pak. Enemies have several interesting death animations depending on the weapon, and it is not uncommon to see a dinosaur with its head blown clean off by a shotgun twitching in a pile of its own gore. Multiplayer mode is impressive with three modes and up to four players: Bloodlust, a standard deathmatch; Frag Tag, in which one unarmed "it" player must avoid the others and reach a checkpoint; and Team Blood, a team-based deathmatch. The frame rate is much smoother here than in single-player, and it is worth spending a night with friends for a snacks-and-couch deathmatch outing. Fans of first-person shooters: grab that trusty bow, mount a faithful Styracosaurus, and start blasting reptiles into tiny, fantastically rendered bits.

Reflections: *Turok 2* was the largest N64 cartridge at its release time (a whopping 32MB!). A larger ROM allowed multiplayer to be incorporated and the progression of visual effects and overall complexity. My friends had moved on from the single-player original *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* towards using *GoldenEye* for multiplayer marathon sessions, and they never really let go. Years later, I brought a stack of N64 games to a party, and this was one of them. Once it was on, it stayed there for most of the night. Something can be said for bringing people together on a couch and losing all track of time while blasting each other to smithereens. This sequel and its predecessor remain somewhat popular today, with remastered versions available on modern computers and consoles. – CW

European Cartridge with Rating Sticker

Japanese Cartridge *Violence Killer: Turok New Generation*

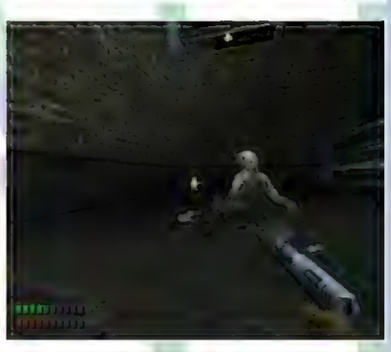
NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Turok 3: Shadow of Oblivion

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Aug. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios Austin
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (Simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (Optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

One of two playable characters dons the mantle of Turok to defeat Oblivion, the world-devouring ancient, in this first-person shooter sequel. The previous Turok, John Fireseed, has been killed, and his sister Danielle and younger brother Joseph take up his fight against evil. The chosen character slightly affects gameplay in the navigation of certain stages. Danielle has access to the energy grapple to move through long, vertical spaces on special grapple targets, while Joseph is smaller and can crawl through holes or tight spaces. Players will traverse each level, blasting dinosaurs, zombies, and alien horrors while pursuing objectives like fetching fuses to power up massive generators. The journey ranges from city streets to toxic waste dumps to the jungles of the Lost Land before finally arriving at Oblivion's fortress. Exploration of these areas is a more linear experience than expected, with few incentives to dig into the otherwise impressive-looking level design. Players begin with a tomahawk or a knife, depending on whether they choose Danielle or Joseph. Both characters also begin with a bow and pistol. While progressing, new weapons and upgrades can be found, such as the Storm Bow that doesn't require a draw time, the Fireswarm with flaming buckshot and sets enemies as well as the environment on fire, and the Cerebral Bore capable of hollowing out an enemy's skull in a gory explosion. Other items scattered through the levels include health pickups, ammunition, and life force pickups that, when collected, increase a player's maximum health. The graphics are gorgeous, especially with the Expansion Pak, which enables lengthy draw distances and sharp textures. However, the frame rate sometimes suffers when too many or large enemies are on the screen. Also included is a multiplayer mode, supporting up to four players or CPU-controlled bots via split screen. Eight modes are available, including Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, and some quirky choices, such as Arsenal of War, where the more players die, the better the weapon they are given after respawning. Frame rate dips occur more frequently in multiplayer but never become debilitating. Whether single-player or multiplayer, the visuals are fantastic, and the story, while nothing to write home about, is executed well through some nicely voiced cutscenes. Shooter fans who want to carve their way through dinos and eldritch abominations should lock and load.

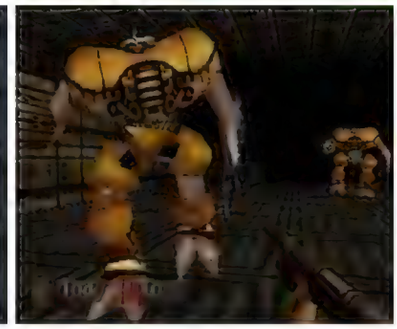
Reflections: The gorgeous graphics of *Turok 3* are genuinely something to behold, but they come at the cost of frame rate dips and design simplification. Enemies don't have as many unique death animations as before, there are fewer weapons overall, and there is no emphasis on exploration or backtracking, owing to a lack of the sort of enhanced power pickups that *Turok 2* had. This stripped-down gameplay is still fun at its core, but even as good as it is (and it is!) I always feel like something is missing, even if I can't always put my finger on it. For me, it also took way too long to get some dinosaurs to shoot instead of some bland aliens and forgettable soldiers. It's still a very solid, worthy title, but the shine began to wear off this one a little. – CW



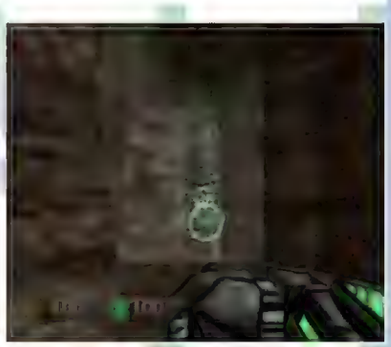
European Cartridge

Turok: Dinosaur Hunter

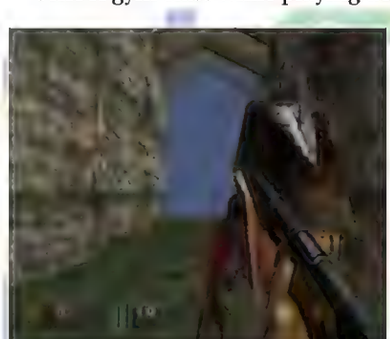
Space-Time Warrior Turok (JP)
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Mar. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

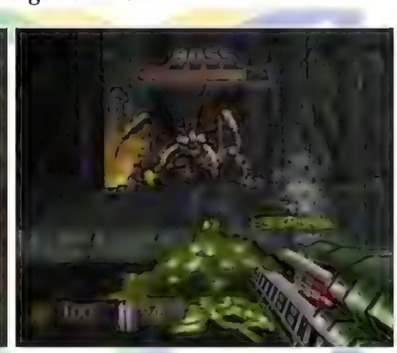


The current bearer of the mantle of Turok, Tal'Set, roars out of the jungle and onto the N64 to defend the barrier between the Earth and the Lost Lands in this polygonal first-person shooter. Blast, swim, jump, and climb through eight treacherous levels, seeking the pieces of the powerful Chronoscepter to stop the villainous Campaigner. Turok's arsenal consists of 13 weapons, like the default knife, bow, shotgun, minigun, and sci-fi weapons like the fusion cannon and assembled Chronoscepter. He will need all of them to fight through waves of dinos, cyborgs, and rapacious insects, as well as the few bosses, such as the giant insectoid Mantis and a cyborg T-Rex with a laser eye. The Lost Lands is a surreal maze of jungle, ruins, and futuristic bases accessed from a central hub. Each of the eight levels is positively massive, both horizontally and vertically, and an on-screen map is available to make sense of the sprawling zones. There are platforming sections where precision jumping is required, and while the tight controls are completely up to the task, some narrow paths and small platforms will lead new players to fall frequently at first. Progress can be saved only at specific save points, though the levels also have a few checkpoints from where players start if they die. Each level contains both a series of keys needed to unlock the portal to another level at the hub and a piece of the Chronocepter. However, their gigantic layouts make finding those keys and pieces something of a chore, especially since enemies will often respawn. Fortunately, killing enemies and exploring yields a cornucopia of ammo drops and health pickups to keep Turok going. Limitations of the early 3D graphics are on display, namely the fog of limited draw distance, but this fog effect is used masterfully to create the jungle mists and darkened ruins where objectives hide. Unfortunately, the music is mostly unremarkable generic jungle drumming, though the sound design of the jungle itself evokes the proper mood. This groundbreaking title should not be missed for someone looking for a first-person shooter with strong exploration elements, satisfying and bloody kills, and the furious roar of dinosaurs charging with murder in their eyes.



Reflections: When *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* was released (dubbed "Turok Tuesday" by Acclaim), my friends and I had barely ever heard the name of Turok, who, as a comic book character, had existed since 1954 in various forms and had been recently revitalized in Valiant Comics in 1993. With its fast, action-packed gameplay and an immense world to explore, the experience made us into true believers, both in Turok as a property and in what was possible on a 3D powerhouse console of the new generation like the Nintendo 64. I will also sheepishly admit to shouting, "I am TUROK!" in middle school gym class while playing dodgeball. – CW





NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge *Space-Time Warrior Turok*

European Cartridge

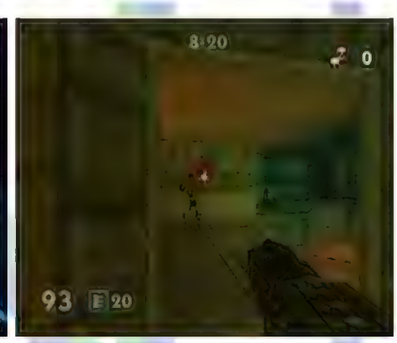
European Cartridge with Age Rating

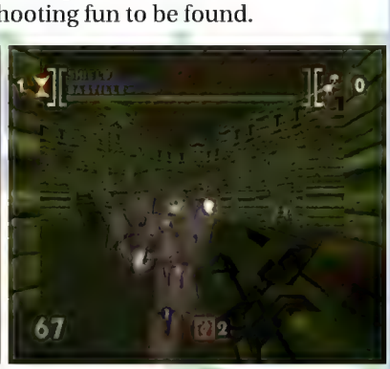
Turok: Rage Wars

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Acclaim Studios Austin
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Frag foes to the heart's bloody content in this multiplayer-focused first-person shooter. 17 hard-hitting human, alien, and dinosaur combatants are ultimately available to participate in the carnage, though 13 must be unlocked through accumulating kills. These heroes include the latest Fireseed son to inherit the heroic Turok mantle, the mutant mastermind Campaigner, and even a ferocious velociraptor, all well-equipped to take on the three available modes. Trials, playable as a single- or two-player cooperative campaign, require fragging a set number of enemies across the 36 labyrinthine maps to clear a set number of missions that change depending on which character players select. These shifting paths are consistently grounded through the same four boss fights, including the energy-shielded Bastille and combat master Tal'Set. These battles are tough, but the heroes are equipped with enough firepower to lay waste to anything in their path. The loadout can be customized at the character select screen and includes Turok's legendary Tek Bow, a trusty shotgun, a nimble boomerang, and a variety of other firearms and explosives. Most of these weapons have a secondary firing mode that changes their range or ammo type, encouraging constant experimentation. For example, the Inflator can pop an enemy with multiple shots, but charging it first with the secondary function can accomplish the task with a single hit. Ammo, health, and other power-ups are available on maps. If Trials prove too easy, players can take on up to three friends or CPU bots in multiplayer mode, competing for frags in the free-for-all Bloodlust or team-based Team Bloodlust and Capture the Flag rulesets. All of these modes require a good understanding of weapon strengths and constant movement, the latter of which can be somewhat tricky due to the sometimes counterintuitive control layout. There are two layouts from which to choose, both of which tend to clash with the speed required for effective aiming and shooting due to their reliance on the C-buttons for movement. These controls can make the experience a bit daunting for newcomers and casual multiplayer matches. Still, for those who commit to mastering movement, there is a lot of challenging, brutal first-person-shooting fun to be found.

Reflections: *Turok: Rage Wars* is something of an enigma – it tries to capture the speed-based gunfighting of its PC FPS contemporaries while maintaining the mazelike level design of the two previous Turok games. The result of this mix never quite reaches the heights achieved by its muses, but it is an engaging experience that allows for a lot of satisfying shooting. This gameplay is complemented well by effective environmental art. Ancient ruins, gothic cathedrals, and neon-coated hellscapes manage to feel like part of the same universe. In fairness, any universe with mutant aliens, Native American warriors, and dinosaurs duking it out would require at least some form of cohesion. A bug-fixed gray *Rage Wars* cart was available via mail in North America to complaining customers, but not many were distributed at the time. The remaining rare carts eventually made their way to the secondary market and into collectors' hands. – CP





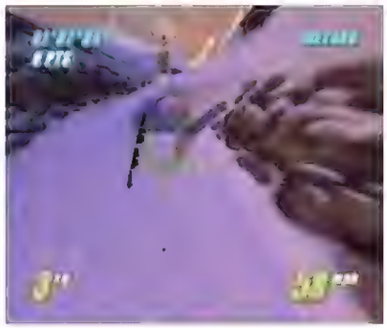
European Cartridge

European Cartridge with Age Rating

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Twisted Edge: Extreme Snowboarding

Twisted Edge Snowboarding (EU)
King Hill 64: Extreme Snowboarding (JP)
Genre: Sports, Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Boss Game Studios
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), Kemco (JP, PAL)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆



Big jumps, monster air, and wicked tricks are all part of the welcoming package to these wintry mountains. The player competes in races against three other CPU snowboarders on seven sprawling downhill tracks populated with jumps, caves, rope bridges, boulders, and more from a third-person perspective. The courses extend in distance based on three difficulty levels, where the most challenging track variant is at least twice as long as the easiest and filled with challenging turns and tight passageways. The roster is composed of fictional characters from around the world individually rated in skill, agility, weight, and strength. Warming up in Practice mode is the way to become familiar with the sensitivity of snowboard maneuvering with the Control Stick, searching out alternate paths and shortcuts, and mastering up to 20 tricks that are possible with a button sequence in midair like pressing DOWN + Z to perform a "Tuna Salad." The controls have a quick learning curve, successfully landing tricks delivers a variety of thrills, and crash-free racing provides an engaging sense of speed. Competition mode is a series of races that distributes placement points after each race, and the winner is whoever accumulates the most points of all the events. There are three primary Competition difficulty levels; this is where the more difficult versions of tracks, in addition to higher-rated characters and boards, can be unlocked. Perform well enough and unlock two bonus difficulty levels, Master and Twisted, where the CPU difficulty amps up and requires almost no wipeouts to stay competitive. After exhausting Competition mode, Stunt Challenge has a score target that must be achieved by nailing as many stunts as possible within a time limit. One-on-one racing with a friend via the split-screen Vs. Race mode is also available. The snowboarders animate well when leaning into turns and executing tricks, which helps distract from the otherwise drab visuals. The audio package features an energetic, bass-heavy rock score and a stereotypical "extreme" announcer. While offering a solid snowboarding experience all around, the core racing gameplay lacks something special and prevents it from reaching the mountain's peak.

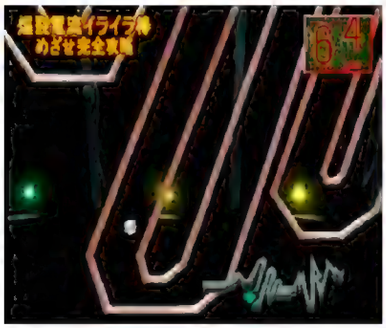
Reflections: I remember seeing *Twisted Edge* at rental and retail stores but never giving it a chance because it was overshadowed by *1080° Snowboarding* and *Snowboard Kids* earlier in the year. It was supposed to be released around that timeframe also before suffering an ill-fated delay to November. According to pre-release developer interviews, the Japanese version was supposed to include an exclusive story mode that would be an unlockable bonus in the North American version. Unfortunately, this never materialized in the finalized release. However, other secrets and codes are abundant, notably an atmospheric nighttime setting and certain eyebrow-raising, hidden characters. – DK

European Cartridge
Twisted Edge Snowboarding

Japanese Cartridge – *King Hill 64: Extreme Snowboarding*

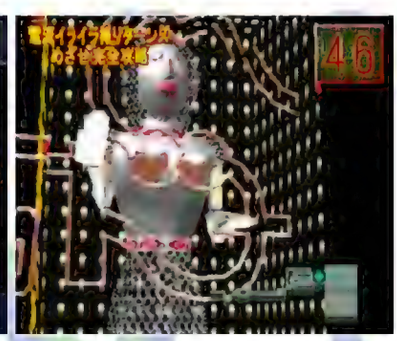
Ucchan Nanchan no Honō no Challenger: Denryū Iraira Bō

[Ucchan Nanchan's Flame Challenger: Irritating Electric Stick]
Genre: Action
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Yuke's
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Rare
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆



Pinpoint precision will be put to the test in this eccentric maze game. After selecting one of four rods with varying movement speed attributes, the player's token will be put into one of six overhead, metallic wire-like mazes. The graphics are 3D, but gameplay occurs on a fixed 2D plane with occasional automated camera shifts. The goal is to reach the finish line before the time expires without touching any borders or obstacles, such as rotating pillars and cogs. Contact will result in the player's rod going up in a haze of smoke and being warped to the stage beginning or the latest checkpoint reached. Adapting to the sensitivity of how fast the rods move is imperative because there is zero room for error. One of the rods acts as a beginner piece that will allow up to two collisions before restarting the stage on a third fail and thus is a highly recommended starting option. Completing mazes with this training piece will not record an official completion time, whereas the other three rods' top completion times are saved to the Game Pak memory. The Control Stick moves the token, and holding the A or Z button enables a speed boost. Having no option to pause feels like an intentional design choice to keep up the frantic gameplay tempo. However, it is still worth emphasizing that this feels unfair when needing a moment to cool down after brutally challenging segments from the final mazes. The last two stages have eye-popping designs, with immense, robot-esque "bosses" to circumvent. The first two mazes provide adequate challenge, but nerves of steel will be paramount for the unforgiving challenge required to push through the last three levels. Picking one of six stages in Time Attack mode is the only single-player offering. The stages do not last that long, with clear times ranging between one and three minutes. There is a two-player split-screen mode where both players only get bumped back upon collisions while attempting to accrue the most points by passing checkpoints within a time limit. Minus the gigantic bosses in the final two levels, the rest of the visuals don't stand out. A fitting up-tempo soundtrack and an optional commentator provide nonstop, over-the-top energy. Ruthless gameplay and an overall lack of content result in finding a hasty retreat from this labyrinth.

Reflections: It's worth reiterating the N64 controller's Control Stick is not truly cut out for this challenge and is a huge contributor to the promised frustration advertised on the back of the game box. *Ucchannanchan no Honō no Challenger: Kore ga Dekitara 100 Man En!!* is a segment of a Japanese game show that serves as the source for this game. SNK's Neo Geo arcade title, *The Irritating Maze*, coincidentally took a stab at a similar maze concept the same year. – DK

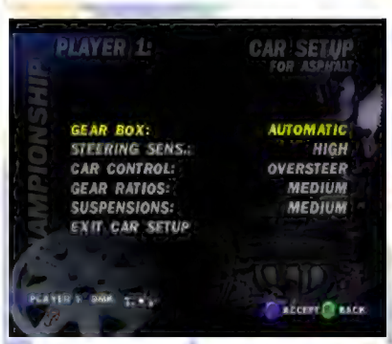


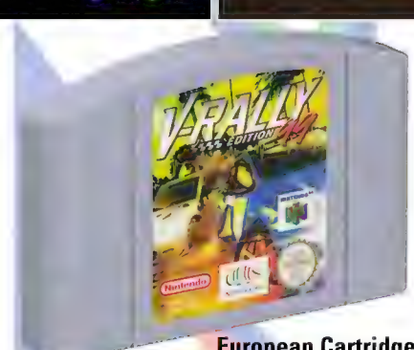
V-Rally Edition 99

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Eden Studios
Publisher: Infogrames (NA, PAL), Spike (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆

This first- or third-person rally-racing simulator travels the globe to eight worldwide locales like New Zealand, Spain, and the French Alps, where drivers will compete on rugged dirt, gravel, snow, and asphalt-based roads. The World Rally Championship license brings 11 official cars (plus four unlockable extra cars), such as the Mitsubishi Lancer and Ford Escort. Navigating these hazardous terrains through varying weather conditions (rain, snow, fog) will require a deep learning curve and practice in the Training and Time Trial modes. Visual cues and an audible co-pilot will alert the severity of each upcoming turn. Car makeup and skillfully easing off the gas and/or tactful use of the brakes will determine cornering success. Before each race, players can adjust vehicle settings in categories like gear ratios, suspension, and steering sensitivity, which is imperative for different surfaces and weather conditions. It requires much practice, but gradually mastering the controls is a gratifying experience when executing precision overtakes and smoothly traversing daunting turns. A major hindrance to core racing is recognizing tiny objects alongside the road that will wildly spin out drivers when barely grazing them. Pressing C-left will instantly reset the vehicle back on track, but the precious race time lost will not go unnoticed. Accumulative race time determines overall placing in Arcade and Championship modes. Both modes have increasingly difficult sets of races against three opponents, and progressing through them will unlock the next set of stages and the four bonus vehicles. All Arcade races are lap-based efforts where the AI races simultaneously against the player. Championship mixes lap races and point-to-point Circuit races with two modifiers: The V-Rally option enables racing against three visible AI competitors simultaneously, or the Rally option can be selected where each driver competes for their best time solo on each race. Arcade and Championship modes have a combined 50 races, all unique, and both can be tackled with a friend in horizontal- or vertical-split-screen multiplayer. The sharp licensed cars are the highlight of the visuals, and while the courses look decent in motion, a closer look reveals numerous washed-out road and terrain textures and noticeable background pop-in. In-race background music volume adjustment is available, which is odd because there is none during races, and the menu music is notably muted. Weighing in these audio/visual hiccups with the commitment required to learn the mechanical intricacies makes it so this rally can only be recommended to ardent racing fans.

Reflections: Rally enthusiasts will be right at home with the huge amount of races and pre-race settings to adjust in *V-Rally Edition 99*. For those intimidated by pre-race customization, the manual has suggested vehicle setting charts for each region. These settings are a handy tool to start with and then build off of based on your preferences to become better acclimated to the physics and handling. It will take some practice to get to that point, and it is worth reiterating those barely visible objects that will send cars spinning are another barrier to tolerate, which is why caution is advised going into this one. – DK





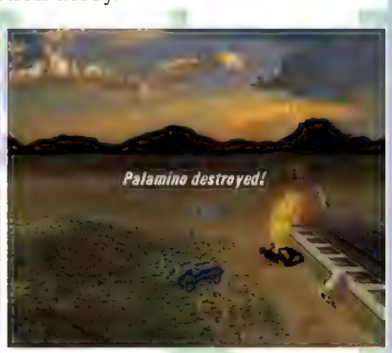
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

Vigilante 8

Genre: Vehicular Combat
Release Date: Mar. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Luxoflux
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

A global oil shortage in 1975 has pitted two factions against each other on U.S. soil in this action-packed vehicular combat game. Players can choose from eight characters: four from the sinister Coyotes terrorist group and the remaining four from an anti-terrorist group calling themselves The Vigilantes. During battles/races, the camera is in third-person or optional behind-the-wheel view. Vehicle movement is controlled with the D-pad or the A and B buttons for brake and gas, respectively, along with the Control Stick. The Z button fires a vehicle's machine gun, and the R button fires the selected weapon. Each character's vehicle and special weapon match their persona. For instance, Beezwax is a hillbilly beekeeper who drives a Stag Pickup outfitted with bees that attack his enemies. Besides the special weaponry, each vehicle can also be outfitted with three additional weapons (homing missiles, mines, etc.) acquired by simply driving over them. Hitting opponents with two weapons simultaneously (called a Whammy) will dole out additional damage. Each character's story plays out through Quest mode, which supports up to two players simultaneously. This mode is a series of four levels for each character, where the player must defeat three enemies within each to win. Players also aim to either protect or destroy a landmark, depending on the faction of the selected character. As players progress, they also earn unlockable characters and stages. A single-player Survival mode and additional multiplayer modes (which support up to four simultaneous players via split-screen) are available, including a free-for-all arcade mode. Battles occur across eight highly detailed stages (with more added when unlocked), including an oil field, ski resort, ghost town, and a Vegas-like city, each with moving props and plenty of destructible environments. Expansion Pak users can take advantage of a surprisingly crisp High-Resolution Mode (passcode MAX_RESOLUTION) for a clearer view of the action. From the hilariously cheesy menu music to each character's outrageous attire, the over-the-top '70s theme will offer players plenty of laughs. The wild and action-packed gameplay is also highly satisfying – combined with the story and tone, they are a glorious disco inferno of a destruction derby.



Reflections: I absolutely love vehicular combat games, but I was late to the party on *Vigilante 8*. I spent my teenage years getting my vehicular destruction from the Twisted Metal series, and I thought *Vigilante 8* looked like a watered-down clone. Boy, was I wrong! The characters and vehicles are just as interesting (and some even more so) than the characters in my beloved Twisted Metal series. Even the 2008 Xbox 360 remake *Vigilante 8 Arcade* passed me by! How does that happen?! Secret code junkies and players who enjoy unlocking extra content will find a lot to love in *Vigilante 8*, especially in this Nintendo 64 version. An unlockable stage called "Super Dreamland 64" places the vehicular combat in a *Super Mario 64*-like arena! How strangely awesome is that?! – MV

European Cartridge

Vigilante 8: 2nd Offense

Genre: Vehicular Combat
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Luxoflux
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

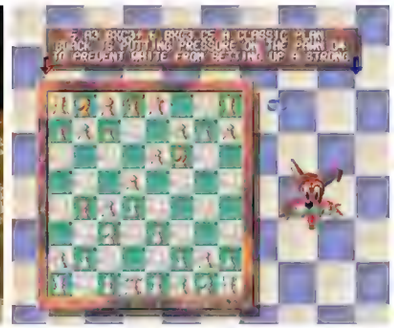
Set two years after *Vigilante 8*, this sequel's story involves time travel, assassination, and even more glorious vehicular combat. Battles transpire in a fixed third-person view behind the controlled vehicle, giving players a solid view of all the action (with an optional first-person view). Quest Mode (single-player or co-op) progresses each character's storyline between battles, tasking them to collect items and/or protect or destroy landmarks while eliminating all enemy vehicles to advance to the next arena. Text and images between stages drive the story, but each character receives a closing cinematic. While playing co-op, only player one's storyline will progress. The sinister Coyotes continue to battle the do-good Vigilantes. However, a mysterious new faction calling themselves Drifters has joined the fight, giving this sequel 18 (nine unlockable) total characters/vehicles. Combat is frantic but easy to finesse, thanks to the smooth controls. Several types of vehicles, each handling differently depending on weight, are at the player's disposal. They include muscle cars, a motorcycle, an RV, and even a garbage truck. Driving over salvage points left by defeated enemies will upgrade a vehicle's acceleration, speed, and armor stats. Picking up fifty points of a particular upgrade will fully upgrade and visually change that part of the vehicle. Vehicles come standard with a weak machine gun, but three additional weapons, such as missiles, rockets, mines, and a vehicle's special weapon, can be picked up and attached during combat. Due to the time travel storyline, vehicles can acquire futuristic power-ups (Hydrofloaters, Ski' N Treads, and Hoverpods) that will transform them to allow travel over water, on snow, and even hover a few feet off the ground. Although these transformations are welcome, they add some odd clipping and other unwanted graphical glitches. The carnage occurs over eight highly detailed arenas, each with secret paths, destructible environments, and various interactive props. The Launch Site, in particular, is an impressive showpiece featuring a shuttle that can launch into space. The single-player Survival mode and a host of 1-4 player simultaneous multiplayer modes, which include Teams and Brawl (last man standing) combat, will keep players battling for a long time. The enemy AI is relentless, but with tight gameplay, crisp visuals, and exciting battles, players may say, "Just one more round."

Reflections: This is the way a sequel should be! More cars, more destruction, and... fewer arenas. Even though *Vigilante 8: 2nd Offense* has two fewer arenas than the original, the quality and size of the included eight are impressive. With the power-up additions, each area feels larger in scope since every inch of it can be explored. Creative players will find ways to experiment with the Hoverpods to reach areas that otherwise shouldn't be accessible, which will come in handy when trying to escape from the tough enemy AI. Pick up the comic book when you can finally put the controller down. The single-issue release by Chaos! Comics fills in a number of *2nd Offense*'s plot points. – MV

European Cartridge

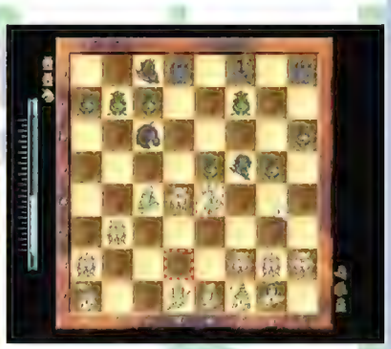
Virtual Chess 64

Genre: Board Game, Strategy
Release Date: June 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Titus France
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



The classic strategic board game arrives on the Nintendo 64! Two opposing sides of pawns, knights, bishops, rooks, and a queen, must attempt to checkmate the opposing king on an eight-by-eight squared checkered board to win. Four 2D board and piece sets are available to play with. Two sets are simple and clean, while a medieval fantasy-themed set and one with cold-climate creatures (with snowmen pawns) opposite African animals are too garish and busy to be easily usable. A rotatable 3D set with wooden pieces is also an option – on this board, short, 3D-animated cutscene battles play when pieces are captured. They are an amusement (maybe?) that can thankfully be turned off. Players can challenge the computer at one of 12 difficulty levels and two beginner levels with "Artificial Stupidity" to help give a human player an advantage. The AI is up to the task and should give even seasoned players a good challenge during average-difficulty sessions. During games, players can take back moves and ask for move recommendations. An up-ticking clock that tracks the "thinking" of both sides and a white/black gauge that judges the side in command can be turned on/off. The highlight may be the deep tutorials presented by Titus the Fox. Players can learn the basics like piece value and movement, castling, en passant, pawn promotion, and more advanced tactics like pinning, trapping, discovered check, mate schemes, and more. There are also 15 entire games that Titus walks through and analyzes, including historical matches between champions. Players from novice to more advanced skill levels should be able to learn from utilizing this educational tool. Other options to tinker with include Meditation (gives the computer more time to think), watching the computer battle itself, and editing the board to play with whatever pieces/position preferred. A unique feature is the ability for a single player to engage in up to four games simultaneously on the screen, or up to three friends can grab a controller so four players can each try to checkmate the computer on their own board. Packed with many features, a formidable AI, and an excellent tutorial suite, this offering should quench the thirst of chess fans, whether they prefer to castle king- or queen-side.

Reflections: It is no surprise that *Virtual Chess 64* was not a big seller, as it would be hard to imagine many chess fans who both owned the Nintendo 64 and had not already found a software solution to play the board game they loved. However, those who dove in pawn-first were likely satisfied. It truly strains to utilize 3D in the somewhat humorous battles, but they aren't as endearing as those found in the PC classic *Battle Chess*. A final aside is the sound effect when taking a piece, which sounds like a cousin to the selection sound in the unfortunate *Carmageddon 64* (also published by Titus and reviewed by yours truly). I didn't expect to experience PTSD while playing chess. – PC

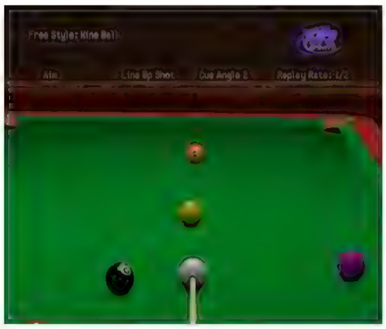


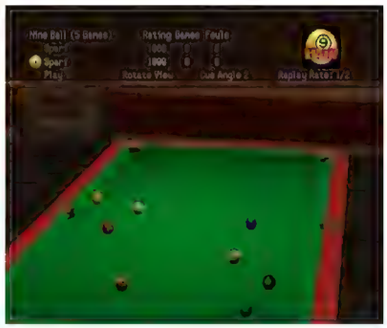
European Cartridge

European Variant Cartridge

Virtual Pool 64

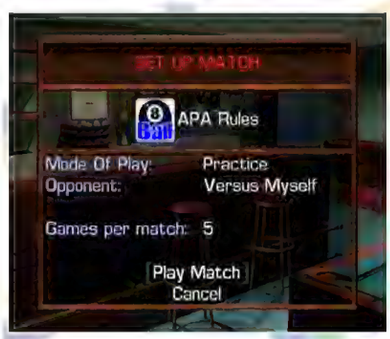
Genre: Billiards
Release Date: Dec. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Celeris
Publisher: Crave Entertainment
Players: 1-4
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆





In this first-person pool simulator, play one of eleven varieties of the classic cue sports game using the official rules of the American Pool Players Association. 8-Ball, which offers three slight rules variants, is won by the player sinking all the colored or striped balls first and finishing with the black 8 ball. 3-Ball, 6-Ball, 9-Ball, and 10-Ball each use different balls to start, requiring the lowest numbered ball to be hit first, with the winner sinking the final ball. Other modes include Straight, where a point goal is determined at the beginning of the match, and each ball counts as one point; Rotation, where the object is to reach 61 points (each ball counts as its numeric value); One Pocket, where each player has to pocket eight balls into their single goal pocket; and Bank, which requires bouncing the ball off a rail before pocketing it. Choose from Single Match, Tournament, Freestyle, or Shark Skins modes against another human or an AI player. Select the difficulty of the CPU players in an array from Pushover to Pool Shark (or even Vicious). However, be warned, the skill levels feel uneven, and often, anything above the lowest tiers will demolish most. Freestyle allows a player and up to three others to play without the computer monitoring the rules, allowing for making trick shots and testing the physics on display. Shark Skins offers a test of skill in which players work their way through three racks of balls in the fewest shots possible. The physics engine is excellent, allowing solid control and realistic action by rotating and adjusting the cue's striking angle. Taking a shot is done by holding the A button and tilting the Control Stick. The speed of movement affects the power of the cue strike. The balls will react and jump just as they would in real life. It is even possible to jump a ball over another or out of the table entirely! In Practice or Freestyle modes, players can activate a display of the angles that balls will move when struck, making for a good teaching tool. The number of rules variants will keep many players busy for quite some time and allow them to learn some obscure methods of play. Unfortunately, the music is unimpressive, and there are only two tracks available. A career mode is lacking, offering only a basic – if impressive – billiards simulation. It is well worth a shot for players who love the physics and rules of billiards without any frills or distractions, but it could become stale quickly.

Reflections: I grew up spending a lot of time around a fire department with my father. There was a pool table in the fire hall for the first few years, and I used to love to knock the balls around on the table. *Virtual Pool 64* takes me back to those days with an impressive physics engine that held my attention for a while and was fun, but I would have preferred to have a career mode and some better music to keep me hooked. I wish it could complete my childhood memory by including Bumper Pool! – CW



European Cartridge

Virtual Pro Wrestling 2: Ōdō Keishō

[Virtual Pro Wrestling 2: Royal Road Succession]
Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Jan. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: AKI
Publisher: Asmik Ace Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Moderate
☆☆☆☆☆

Ninety-eight of Japan's top wrestlers have gathered for in-ring warfare in hopes of winning championship gold in this sequel to *Virtual Pro Wrestling 64*. All Japan Pro Wrestling is officially licensed and represented by 21 stars like Giant Baba, Mitsuharu Misawa, and Big Van Vader. The remaining slots are wrestlers with passing resemblances to real-world counterparts in Japanese promotions like New Japan, FMW, and Pride. An elevated ringside camera captures all of the action. The heart of the great control mechanics uses the A and B buttons to perform grapples and strikes. Light button taps yield weaker grapples and strikes. Strong attacks can be attempted by holding the A or B buttons, such as Stan Hansen's Powerbomb Pin or Andre the Giant's Big Boot. However, wrestlers should only attempt them after weakening opponents with weak attacks first since strong attacks are prone to reversals if attempted too early. The C-buttons operate running and high-flying maneuvers, including interesting running grapple moves like the Hurricanrana and a Running Bulldog. The more consistently dominant a wrestler is on offense, the more the SPIRIT meter rises, making stronger moves easier to execute. When it maxes out and pulsates "SPECIAL" (in Japanese), signature moves like Kenta Kobashi's Burning Hammer can be executed for mega damage (or using an opponent's signature move against them!). Defensively, a timely L button press can counter a strike, and R can counter a grapple move by an aggressor. Mixed Martial Arts rules can also be applied to matches to open up new moves and strategies. The number and length of rounds for MMA matches can be set, as well as winning by KO, submission, or points. MMA matches can involve any wrestler, but it is recommended for real mixed martial artists from MMA groups like Pancrase or Pride FC in order to use ground attacks/submissions for a more authentic experience.

Royal Road Succession is the flagship single-player mode that takes the player through 52 weeks of All Japan Pro Wrestling to win all of AJPW's championships and tournaments. Other play methods include Exhibition mode offerings for up to four players in singles, tag team, 3-Way, and 4-40 player Battle Royal elimination matches. Many customization modes are also available for creating detailed wrestlers (with an optional mask creator!), championship belts, and tournaments. A fantastic audio/visual package is highlighted with vivid renditions of Japanese arenas like the Tokyo Dome, ring introduction voiceovers, and gruesomely accurate move animations. This title deserves its own Triple Crown championship award for standout gameplay, playstyle diversity, and representing the quintessence of Japanese wrestling.

Reflections: AKI continues its string of five-star classics in this golden age of wrestling video games. *Virtual Pro Wrestling 2* is the sister title to *WWF WrestleMania 2000*, as it was released only a few months after the North American wrasslin' title and utilized the same engine. *Virtual Pro Wrestling 2* was AKI's only attempt to portray MMA, which is a shame because they laid a solid foundation to build off of here. I came away from the experience appreciating all the Japanese wrestling minutiae not often found in the West. This includes entrances emanating from locker rooms, emphasis on tournaments in Royal Road Succession, and a sickle that can be retrieved from the crowd (which can serve as a great excuse to create a custom wrestler who cosplays as the Grim Reaper). It is a tossup in many enthusiast circles of what is the best AKI-developed game on the N64. *Virtual Pro Wrestling 2* makes an imploring case with its gigantic, all-encompassing roster, finely-tuned play mechanics, and a surplus of play options and unlocks for maximum replay value. Please do not overlook this because of the lack of an official American promotion license, as it is as impressive as the best AKI games that made their way stateside. – DK

Virtual Pro Wrestling 64

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: JP
Developer: AKI
Publisher: Asmik Ace Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆☆

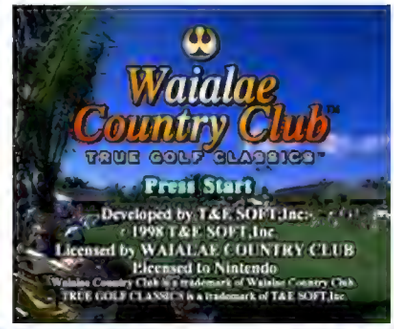
Wrestling's talent from Japan and WCW collides in the ring in this all-star crossover. This release comes only a month after AKI's North American wrestling game, *WCW vs. nWo: World Tour*, but features a slate of new additions to differentiate it. The bell-to-bell action transpires from a camera perspective that aims down from the front of the squared circle. The bell-to-bell action transpires from a camera perspective that aims down from the front of the squared circle. Various maneuvers/attacks are available from different positions: standing, ground, running, turnbuckle, diving, and more. The controls have a natural progression of how televised matches appear, with bouts starting with lighter punches and blows done via taps of the B button and weak grapple moves and holds, like Tiger Mask's Elbow Smash or Bodyslam, performed with the A button. After softening up an opponent, holding the B button will perform a powerful strike less likely to be countered, such as Ultimo Dragon's Dropkick, or initiate a strong grapple by holding the A button for an effective slam, like Rey Mysterio Jr.'s Headscissors. A defensive reversal system is also in place. The L button can slap an opponent's grapple away, and a timely R tap as an opponent attacks can initiate a counter/reversal. A SPIRIT meter grows and shrinks with match progression, and the meter will flash "SPECIAL" (in Japanese) upon maxing out, which allows the execution of signature moves like Great Sasuke's Tiger Suplex. Note: wrestlers can also "steal" their opponent's special move!

Aside from featuring 20 brawlers from WCW/nWo, five included unlicensed leagues are based chiefly on actual Japanese promotions like New Japan, All Japan, Pancrase, and Michinoku Pro. Winning points-based round-robin tournaments in Champion Road mode will qualify for each federation's championships. Winning titles will unlock more wrestlers and past greats in a bonus Legends league consisting of icons like Antonio Inoki, Rikidozan, and Andre the Giant. Other modes include custom round-robin leagues and bracketed tournaments. Exhibition mode allows up to four players to fight for bragging rights in singles, tag team, and four-player Battle Royal elimination action. Wrestler Edit mode enables renaming wrestlers and switching up their costumes but doesn't allow creating new grapplers from scratch. The graphics and presentation leave much to be desired, with unimpressive facial designs, generic-looking venues, and no ring-walking entrances or accompanying theme music. However, the excellent original soundtrack amps up the gameplay. Despite some shortcomings, this is an addictingly fun wrestling experience that warrants frequent revisiting of its towering roster of 110 wrestlers.

Reflections: While the controls, gameplay, and audio/visual presentation are nearly identical to the NA/PAL game *WCW vs. nWo: World Tour*, *Virtual Pro Wrestling 64* isn't just a Japanese-flavored update. Features that debut here include a post-match stats screen, the Wrestler Edit mode, a caricatured 2D referee that pops up to call pins and submissions, and the strong grapple combo-strike system that would appear in AKI's next North American game, *WCW/nWo Revenge*. These new features give *Virtual Pro Wrestling 64* its own identity, especially considering the massive roster that can yield countless dream match-ups or peculiar recreations of past international debacles, like Antonio Inoki vs. Muhammad Ali. – DK

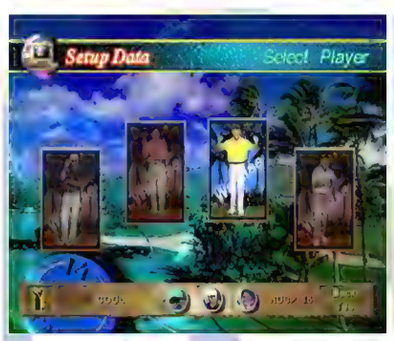
Waialae Country Club: True Golf Classics

Genre: Sports
Release Date: July 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: T&E Soft
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆



Grab a bag of clubs and hit some balls alone or with up to three friends in this tedious take on the world's most relaxing sport. The standard rules of golf apply here – use a variety of clubs to complete course holes in as few strokes as possible. A swing meter appears each time the golfer lines up to take a shot. Pressing the A button three times will determine power and distance, though the actual process of hitting the ball feels sensitive to the point of being arbitrary, especially when putting. The frustration surrounding the gameplay mechanics is compounded by its boring visual and audio presentation. The historic Waialae Country Club in Honolulu is somewhat recreated. However, the rotoscoped sprites representing golfers, foliage, and audience members lack the meaningful details needed to capture the targeted opulence adequately. The scant announcer commentary is also bland to the point that turning it off changes nothing. Before teeing off, choose a golfer to act as a virtual avatar. These character choices are just as bland as the environment, with four polo-wearing options that may just as well be palette swaps. The selection process is somewhat salvaged by stat and club customization; players can change their golfer's driving power, club handling, putting, ball recovery, and wind resistance on a one-to-five scale, while different club heads can be chosen to further enhance driving/putting distance or ensure better ball control. Sadly, the finicky power bar can render many of these choices moot. After rounding out an avatar choice by choosing a caddy from an additional four white-clad characters, players are finally ready to hit the course. Four modes are offered, most for between one to four players. The Waialae Open encompasses a four-day tournament where a golfer must place at least 40th on the second day to proceed. Tournament Play allows the play of just the final day of the Waialae Open, while Stroke Play and Skins allow golfers to play 18 holes (and bet virtual money on each hole for Skins). Match Play is a two-player mode that requires one player to win more individual holes than the other. Finally, players can jump into a round of golf using Quick Start or practice the course using Practice Play. These golf modes ultimately feel the same, and none of them can overcome the lack of course variety, visual monotony, and oversensitive swing meter enough to be very enjoyable.

Reflections: Surprisingly or not, *Waialae Country Club* was a second-party sports title published by Nintendo, similar to *Kobe Bryant in NBA Courtside*. I have always liked the aesthetic of the real-life Waialae golf course, so a virtual version sounded great. Unfortunately, the little bit of fun to be found in this remake of the 1994 3DO original (mostly caused by my friends laughing at me for constantly overshooting putts) is vastly overshadowed by its mediocrity. While the idea of recreating a real-life golf course is a good idea for a simulation game, the volcanoes, beaches, and waterworks found throughout Hawaii make the measly 18 holes present seem like a wasted opportunity for a multi-course tropical getaway. – CP



European Cartridge

War Gods

Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Apr. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Games
Ported by: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: None
Availability: Common
☆☆

An alien ship crashes on Earth, scattering an ore that changes ten humans into fierce fighters. Players must defeat a series of combatants in this one-on-one 3D fighting game to prove they are the greatest warrior of all time. Character avatars are a mixed bag of ancient civilization archetypes, including an Egyptian god, an evil high priest, gladiator, a Kabuki fighter, an undead Voodoo god, and more. Each contest is a traditional battle to win two of three rounds. The motion-captured warriors share basic moves, including low and high punches and kicks (including uppercuts and leg sweeps), throws, shoves, blocks, and jumping attacks. Special moves such as fireballs, teleportation attacks, and dash maneuvers give characters a slightly unique feel. However, performing the button combos required to use these attacks is often stiff and cumbersome. The winning player can attempt to execute a dramatic round-ending fatality, including gruesome moves such as eating the opponent's heart, killing them with a voodoo doll, and unleashing an atomic bomb blast. Moving in the 3D stages can be confusing, as the camera struggles to frame the action. AI opponents sometimes become inhumanely tough, even on the easiest settings, and halfway through the set of opponents faced, the difficulty increases sharply. There are no true protagonists to root for, which sours any sense of intrigue or world-building. Each character has a blurb of exposition to flesh out their backstory, but none of this is in-game, just the instruction manual, and the two end bosses are green monsters thrown in with no explanation. There are also no endings, just a block of text informing players of their victory. These shortcomings remove a lot of gravitas from the experience. The only thing worth doing with each warrior is trying out their moves and fatalities. There are brief glimmers of fun, but otherwise, it is a generic fighter with little to offer.

Reflections: *War Gods* clearly takes many pointers from *Mortal Kombat*, including its control style, the dark and moody atmosphere, and match-ending fatalities. The theme also appeared in 1992's *Time Killers*, featuring fighters from historic periods. *War Gods* does a solid job presentation-wise, and being able to move in 3D stages is an interesting experiment that, sadly, falls flat in execution. I didn't expect an Oscar-winning story, but the tropes used for world-building are just lazy. Nothing is likable or interesting about any of the characters – one of the facets that a fighting game needs to nail to make things engaging. Can you imagine playing *Street Fighter II* or *Killer Instinct* with generic protagonists? If you cannot, *War Gods* will show you what that would be like. – JE

European Cartridge

Wave Race 64

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

Kawasaki Jet Skis are ready to skim the water and rush to the finish line in this dazzling racer. Championship mode is the main aquatic attraction where the player races in a third-person perspective against three CPU opponents to earn enough points via finishing to continue the campaign. Normal has a six-course circuit, Hard has seven, and Expert has eight. Four different personal watercraft are available to choose from, each tied to a specific driver. They vary in handling, grip, collision stability, maximum speed, and acceleration. However, each Jet Ski can be customized further on a gradient scale for handling (light vs. heavy), engine (acceleration vs. top speed), and grip (looser but quicker vs. tighter but slower). During races, the player dashes around while cornering for the default three laps, contending with realistic water mechanics that bounce the Jet Ski about, necessitating almost constant driving adjustments. Adapting to the physics of the dynamic bobbing of water and flow of waves is a mini-game in and of itself, which means players must truly learn to control the watercraft. The gameplay is simple but deep, with leaning forward and backward to change the center of gravity, sliding on the water, and softening the bouncing on waves all possible; they may not always be necessary, but top racing requires their mastery. Buoys must be successfully navigated during races (pass red ones on the right and yellow on the left), and doing so consecutively increases the Jet Ski's top engine speed on a five-point scale. However, missing one buoy reverts to default speed, and missing five buoys disqualifies the racer. Ramps for jumps, floating boxes, and obstacles require constant keen attention, as do some tighter pathways, where even brushing against a wall/object can mean the racer loses their watercraft grip.

Only eight courses are available (not counting the lovely Dolphin Park practice area). However, the marshy Drake Lake, twisty Twilight City, icy Glacier Coast, and others maintain interest due to changing water levels, varying obstacles in different difficulties, and some having alternate pathways. All courses are available for Time Trials, a solo attempt for record times. The last option is Stunt Mode, an interesting one-lap attempt to rack up points by passing through hoops and performing trick jumps and riding maneuvers (riding while backward, standing up, or doing a handstand). The environments look pleasing, with transparent but reflective water, and the steady frame rate conveys a good sense of speed. An enthusiastic announcer ("OK! Good!") lightens the mood (but can be a bit much), and outstanding sound effects deliver. Nice two-player head-to-head action and a decent amount of options round out an absorbing, unique aquatic experience for racing and non-racing fans alike.

Reflections: "Maximum power!" This follow-up to the Game Boy's *Wave Race* (1992) was only the third N64 game released and was a critical and commercial smash hit, showcasing not only the system's great graphical power but also the unique Control Stick. The changing patterns of the water movement, rising/lowering tides, and random waves were really amazing to behold on a game console at the time. They keep the title an engaging experience all these decades later. *Wave Race 64* would be followed by a sequel, *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, on the GameCube in 2001. Much like the F-Zero franchise, Nintendo's spin on the racing genre (in aquatic form) is anything but ordinary and is one I am hopeful Nintendo returns to. "Banzai!" – PC

Wave Race 64 Shindō Pak Taiō Bājon

[Wave Race 64 Rumble Pak Compatible Version]
Genre: Racing
Release Date: July 1997
Region: JP
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆☆

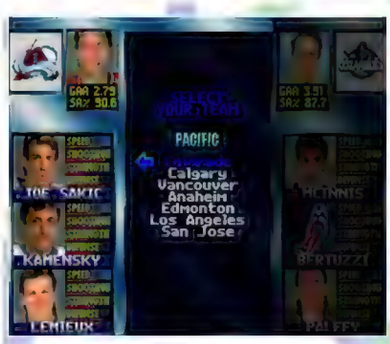
Also referred to as *Wave Race 64 Shindō Edition*, this re-release of the excellent watercraft racing title adds Shindō Pak (Rumble Pak) support to the game. In this version, the race announcer dialogue is altered, some sound effects are different, and some race course music has been remixed. Another difference can be seen in Time Trials mode, which now has a ghost dolphin representing the best course run. Please refer to the previous entry for a complete review of this game title. – PC

Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Atari Games
Ported by: Midway Home Entertainment
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GameBank (JP), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

This NHL/NHLPA licensed arcade port has all the trappings of an exciting four-player hockey game: shooting, checking, fighting, and trying to score against goalies who transform into brick walls. Players choose from the 26 NHL teams to start an exhibition, a 25- or 82-game season with playoffs, or an arcade season where they face off against every other team in the league. The default contest is a fast-paced three-on-three matchup with no rules and no penalties, but players who wish to hone their skills can do so in practice mode. Season modes are single-player only, which is a little disappointing. The action is quick overall, and thanks to the easy-to-learn controls, anybody can jump in and pull off amazing plays. Player movement is handled with the Control Stick. Passing, shooting, turbo, and checking are mapped to controller buttons. The over-the-top 3D player models, transforming goalies, and pucks that catch fire are truly a sight to behold, as are the fistfights that can break out between players. The tight broadcast perspective and neon-flashing pucks (followed by colorful streaks when moving quickly) make following the action a breeze. The audio features quick-witted commentary from Tim Kitzrow and a blaring ambulance siren whenever landing a big body check. Players looking for a more realistic hockey experience can choose the "simulation" option in the settings menu. Although the mode allows players to play with penalties, it still contains the same exaggerated checks and insanely fast shots prevalent in the arcade mode. Unfortunately, both modes contain rubber band AI, meaning computer-controlled opponents that are losing always manage to keep the score close. Several options (depending on the mode) are available for players to tailor other aspects of play. These include seven camera angles (horizontal, vertical, etc.), arcade and simulation rink sizes, team size (three, four, or five players plus the goalie), difficulty, penalties on or off, and period length. Players looking for easy-to-pick-up arcade-style hockey will almost surely find this experience to be a great one.

Reflections: *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey* is one of the first arcade hockey games I can remember playing. I absolutely love hockey, and I have titles like this and the Electronic Arts' NHL series to thank for that. There is something about hockey's quick speed and viciousness that translates perfectly to video games. I've always enjoyed fighting in hockey video games, and I view the fisticuffs in this title as a bonus button-mashing mini-game. A rumor at the time was that the fighting would include fatalities. This sounds amazing, but looking back, it's probably a good idea that it never happened. *Wayne* also was the first four-player N64 title, as it reached the public several weeks before *Mario Kart 64* was released in Japan. – MV



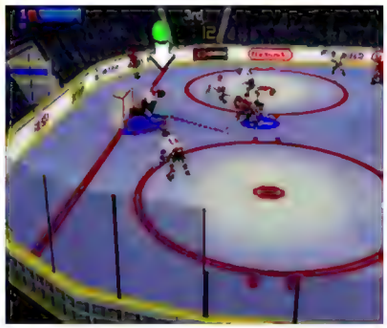
European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "-1" Variant Cartridge

Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: Dec. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Software Creations
Pub.: Midway Home Entertainment (NA), GT Interactive Software (PAL)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



Wayne Gretzky and the rest of the National Hockey League's stars are back in this second installment of the NHL- and NHLPA-licensed arcade hockey franchise, complete with roster updates for the 1998 season. 25- and 82-game seasons with playoffs and arcade season modes are confined to a single player. Thankfully, up to four players can join the action in the versus mode for some true, frantic action. The main three-on-three arcade mode perfectly blends breakneck speed and over-the-top hard-hitting action. Various camera angles (overhead and side view) are available and handy when playing four-on-four or five-on-five hockey so players can keep the puck in their sights. The simulation mode (featuring matches with teams of three, four, or five players) is available to those looking for a more realistic experience. The on-ice gameplay also includes a "power shot" feature activated when simultaneously pressing the shoot and turbo buttons. If the shot meets the back of the net, the net will catch fire in a spectacular display, which is fun to watch. The rubber band AI keeps matches artificially close, particularly when the computer falls behind on the scoreboard. The music, sound effects, and commentary are loud and over-the-top, which fits the arcade experience. The Tim Kitzrow audio commentary doesn't repeat often, but players might still visit the options menu to mute it after a few games. The many options available include toggling penalty settings, fighting, player fatigue, line changes, rink size, play speed, and period length. Those who like to tinker with team rosters to keep them current or manage deployments will be happy to know they can freely trade players between teams and adjust default player lines. For on-ice players searching for a solid arcade-style hockey game, this entry checks those boxes with intensity.

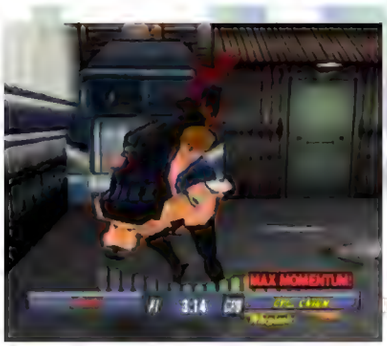
Reflections: The skating animations in *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98* and the original *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey* were generated by creating a 3D model that imitated Gretzky's actual skating movements. However, you wouldn't know this if you saw the hulking player models skating in-game, as they just don't look great. One of my favorite things to do when spending quality time with my retro game consoles is to pop in a good old NHL game from the 1990s. We were spoiled with some of the sport's greatest legends to hit the ice back then. Wayne Gretzky is, and probably always will be, the greatest hockey player of all time. – MV

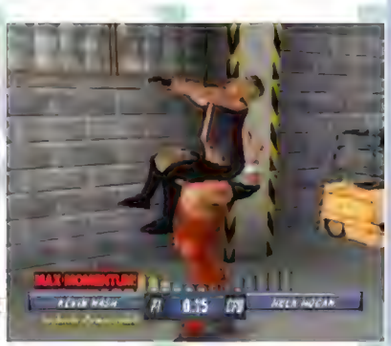
European Cartridge

WCW Backstage Assault

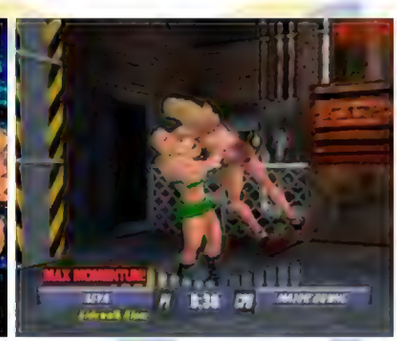
Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Dec. 2000
Region: NA
Developer: Kodiak Interactive Software Studios
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆

What would a professional wrestling game be like with no ring? That question is answered by dropping 58 WCW competitors into 14 backstage environments, like a loading bay, media center, or parking garage, and letting them battle it out with chairs, tables, and anything else they can get their hands on. Traditional moves such as bodyslams and suplexes can still be executed out of grapples, running attacks like clotheslines and body presses, and ground attacks like stomps and submissions like the Boston Crab. The 3D perspective stays in front of the two competitors as they trade blows to fill up a Momentum Meter. When "Max Momentum" displays, a finishing maneuver can be unleashed, such as Jeff Jarrett's "The Stroke." The meter switches to whoever dominates the offense, and it will take a flurry of opposing moves to shift it back in the opposite direction. When a wrestler's name flashes red, their health is dangerously low. At this point, a pin or submission will likely take them out for good. While the backstage brawling is fun in spurts, the gameplay suffers from sluggish controls, choppy animation, and collision detection issues. On top of these issues, wrestlers react to weaponry that isn't even close to connecting. Additional win modifiers, such as making adversaries bleed to prevail or where lighting opponents on fire achieves victory (Human Torch), can also be applied. Environmental fixtures can be interacted with, like ripping urinals off bathroom walls or climbing onto crates to perform aerial maneuvers like the Double Axe Handle. In Exhibition mode, a match is set up against a single CPU or human player. Hardcore Challenge mode has the player fighting for championship titles by winning multiple matches. Hardcore Gauntlet is a string of battles against seven foes where endurance is critical, as health carries over to each successive bout. Only 33 wrestlers are available from the start, but the full-featured Create-a-Wrestler tool lets players customize a character anytime. However, character models appear terribly wrong because wrestlers appear as meek, washed-out representations of their televised counterparts. While removing the wrestling ring is a bold direction, the execution of the action leaves much to be desired.



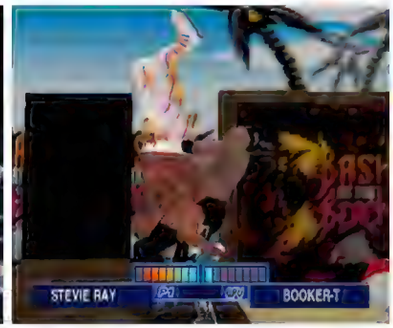


Reflections: *WCW Backstage Assault* was released just three months before WCW was acquired by WWE, making it the final chapter for WCW video games. And what a sad, disappointing end it was. The backstage action was a marquee feature in the previous title, *WCW Mayhem*, so to see this follow-up double down on that made sense on paper. *Backstage Assault* could have been a fun send-off if it wasn't plagued with mechanical issues, a majority of the roster needing to be unlocked, multiplayer for only two players, and shockingly diminished graphics. – DK



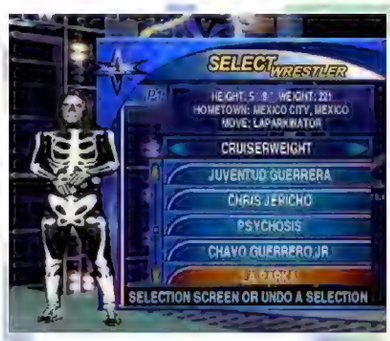
WCW Mayhem

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Kodiak Interactive Software Studios
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆



"Mayhem" like no other awaits players in this WCW pro wrestling title. In-ring combat transpires from a camera angle slightly elevated in front of the ring. Wrestlers can run into backstage environments like the locker room or first-aid area to brawl, at which point the camera will dynamically shift to angles in front of them. Each grappler has a Momentum Meter on the bottom of the screen that will increase as they successively deliver moves, holds, and strikes without interruption, such as Booker T's Back Breaker, Chris Jericho's Camel Clutch, and Bam Bam Bigelow's Headbutt, respectively. Once topped off, the meter will flash, and a finishing move (like DDP's Diamond Cutter) can be performed from a grapple via a flick of the Control Stick. Pins and submissions are the keys to victory, and they primarily occur when Momentum is high. Unfortunately, maxing out the Momentum Meter is troublesome because even one opposing blow will instantly drain all the Momentum accumulated. 56 stars of WCW make up the roster, 17 of which can be unlocked from Quest for the Best mode, where a wrestler must win five ranking matches to earn a TV title shot, defend it five times, and then repeat the process for both the United States and World Championship titles. Additional match variants include Singles, Tag Team, 2-on-1 Handicap, Triangle, Four Way Dance, and a four-player over-the-top-rope elimination Battle Royal. Other than Battle Royal, the other match types switch up the number of wrestlers competing at once and the number of players on each team. They all share the goal of securing the first pin or submission to win. The characters all sport a high level of facial and costume detail but notably have awkward idle animations where they all hold their hands out like they are ready for a game of Patty-cake. Backstage brawling is fun and is a stand-out feature, but the Momentum Meter hampers enjoyment with its unforgiving sensitivity. Besides the meter issue, sparse specialty match options and a barebones single-player mode keep the experience from greatness. However, the backstage brawling is a fun, stand-out feature that complements an otherwise solid core of wrestling action.

Reflections: Battling backstage in *WCW Mayhem* was a big deal when it was released. It was the first wrestling title to add this feature, and competitors quickly copied it for their titles the following year. Tony Schiavone's play-by-play is impressive, too, though the N64 release removed Bobby Heenan's commentary due to the cartridge format's limited storage. Pay-Per-View Password mode was an ambitious feature where WCW telecasts aired a password to enter into the game that would auto-generate four matches from upcoming PPV events to play in *Mayhem*. However, this lasted only a few months because of WCW's wildly rotating roster. – DK

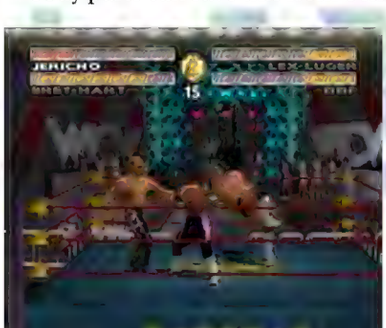


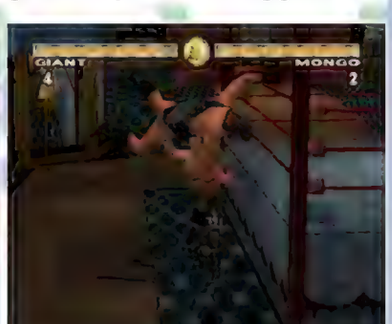
European Cartridge

WCW Nitro

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Feb. 1999
Region: NA
Developer: Inland Productions
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆

The stars from WCW's professional wrestling television show, *WCW Monday Nitro*, are ready to rip each other apart on the Nintendo 64. The camera sits before the ring and gradually rotates around the arena as the action unfolds. The opponent's health will whittle down with each punch, kick, and slam successfully delivered, and a nearly-depleted life bar will almost guarantee pin or submission victory. Sixteen real-world wrestlers, such as Bret Hart, Chris Jericho, and Scott Steiner, are available from the start. Players can unlock 48 additional male and female characters by completing the 1P Tournament mode, a straightforward ladder of ten singles matches. Players will have to do this once for each unlockable wrestler, so get ready for a grind to unlock Disco Inferno or Madusa (or enter a code to unlock them all). Unfortunately, wrestlers share the same universal move list besides three exclusive moves each. Exhibition mode for singles and tag team matches is available for up to two players, along with Battle Royal, where wrestlers must be thrown over the ropes to be eliminated, for up to four players. However, the real obstacle between the player and victory is the atrocious, non-customizable controls. Punches, chops, and kicks are assigned to the C-buttons, which are frequently unresponsive in the heat of battle. If this was not frustrating enough, the gameplay mechanics are a mess. Specific moves require a two- or three-button sequence, such as C-left and then C-down, to perform a powerbomb. Doing a finishing hold, such as Goldberg's Jackhammer, can only be executed when a rival's health is dangerously low. Timing all these moves is tight and nearly impossible when factoring in the awkward inputs, so be prepared for full-on agitation. Opponent AI is ruthless on the normal default difficulty, yet sliding it down to "easy" turns them into complete pushovers with ridiculously short match lengths, leaving no satisfying middle ground for a fair challenge. The washed-out graphics are painful to see, especially when factoring in stilted animations and slowdown in tag team and Battle Royal matches. Not even codes that unlock peculiar ring settings and oversized body parts can save this from being a travesty of a wrestling game.





Reflections: This is one of the worst wrestling games of the 3D polygon era, with abysmal controls and a lack of features. The only good things to come out of the *WCW Nitro* game are the full-motion video clips for each wrestler on the character select screen, where they taunt players into choosing them. These went down in infamy for some of the cast (most notably Kevin Nash) being in questionable states when recording. Unfortunately, these character promos are exclusive to the PlayStation version due to N64's cartridge format limitations. Find clips of those videos online, and you'll never have to play this game yourself. – DK

WCW vs. nWo: World Tour

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: AKI Corporation
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

The battle for control of the pro wrestling organization WCW has gone global, with stars of WCW and the nWo traveling to square off against international talent. Forty-three wrestlers comprise the roster, including 24 licensed WCW/nWo competitors like Hulk Hogan, Sting, and Buff Bagwell. Pseudonymous names for non-WCW wrestlers are used, like TAKA Michinoku as "Black Belt" and Abdullah the Butcher as "Saladin." Wrestlers duel from a camera view in front of the ring, peering slightly down from the audience. Each wrestler has a unique move set based on pressure-sensitive grapple and strike commands assigned to the A and B buttons. Tapping them and the D-pad initiates a weak punch/kick or a weak front/back grapple that performs basic bodyslams and suplexes. Holding those buttons enables stronger strikes like lariats and allows for strong grapple moves like the neckbreaker or brainbuster. This control scheme works for various attacks, such as mat, running, rope, and turnbuckle types. Matches should start with weak strikes and grapples before stronger ones are attempted, or the wrestler risks a greater rate of reversals (the player can attempt a counter). As wrestlers dominate matches, their Spirit Meter expands until it flashes "SPECIAL," at which point the wrestler can execute powerful signature maneuvers. Examples include The Giant's Chokeslam from the standing grapple position or Sting's Scorpion Deathlock mat submission. The gameplay gels together exquisitely, and the fun multiplies when involving up to four players, all vying for a pin or submission win in Singles, Tag Team, and free-for-all Battle Royal elimination matches. League mode sets up a round-robin tournament where the winner is decided by point total from accumulated wins, losses, and draws. WCW vs. nWo mode is an endurance-focused five-on-five team battle, where the wrestler who wins the match stays to take on the next team's combatant and retains damage already sustained. League Challenge lets players unlock hidden wrestlers after defeating every promotion's champion after a string of qualifying matches. The audio/visual package is lacking in certain aspects, most notably the facial designs for most wrestlers being ridiculously off-base. The venues are also visually unappealing, and no wrestler theme music exists. Despite those setbacks, the first N64 pro wrestling game remains a compelling experience and an impressive WCW debut.

Reflections: There is a reason why the AKI N64 titles are still revered today. Before this title, most American-released wrestling games (minus a few exceptions) were middling efforts at best. When I first played *World Tour*, it instantly enlightened me to how wrestling games should have been designed all along. AKI improved on this with every following iteration, as well. I also want to give kudos to composer Hideaki Mitsui for his pulsating rock beats that amplified *World Tour*'s gameplay; this wrestling game score has remained my favorite to this day. – DK

European Cartridge

WCW/nWo Revenge

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Oct. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: AKI Corporation
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆☆

This successor to *WCW vs. nWo: World Tour* begins with a high-energy cinematic that finishes with "Hollywood" Hulk Hogan and Sting emitting electronic blasts at each other, perfectly setting the tone for a bombastic wrestling game. Those fierce rivals are only two of the 62-man roster (which includes real-world and fictional characters) that will tear it up in the ring via a high-up television-style ringside camera. Intuitive controls immediately make the gameplay accessible for wrestling game veterans and newcomers. Short A or B button presses initiate weak grapples and attacks, respectively. At the same time, the C-buttons do everything from letting wrestlers grab weapons from the crowd to climbing up on the turnbuckle. After connecting with a few simple moves, stronger strikes and grapple maneuvers like Lex Luger's powerslam can be attempted by holding the B or A buttons down. Various other wrestling moves can be performed, including aerial turnbuckle attacks like Rey Mysterio Jr's. twisting moonsault, running attacks like a clothesline from Kevin Nash, ground attacks like Dean Malenko's ankle lock or Ultimo Dragon's senton, and combination attacks out of strong grapples for certain wrestlers. Executing attacks builds the on-screen Spirit meter, which will flash "special!" upon its zenith and enable a finisher move, like Glacier's Cryonic Kick or DDP's Diamond Cutter. Defensive play occurs by holding the R trigger upon rising from the mat to launch into a counterattack stance. Well-timed counter-grapples (L) and strikes (R) can be performed to keep a comeback alive against careless opponents.

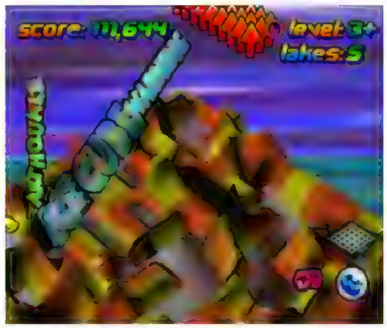
A variety of wrestling experiences are available through numerous modes and different match options. Winning all five WCW titles in the main Championship mode by beating several opponents in a row will unlock hidden wrestlers, while Exhibition lets players jump in for one match. Singles and Tag Team offer quick matches, as well, and they also support four-player multiplayer. Battle Royal is a wild 4-40 wrestler free-for-all where opponents are eliminated one at a time by over-the-top rope disposal, pin, KO, or submission, although four competitors at a time is the limit. New competitors soon replace defeated opponents, creating an intense survival-style atmosphere. Finally, in Costume Change mode, players can alter wrestlers' ring attire and rename wrestlers, though new competitors cannot be created from the ground up. The graphical presentation is superb. Wrestler costumes and faces are authentically replicated, as are move animations and venue settings for special events such as Halloween Havoc and Starrcade. There are no wrestler entrance themes. However, broadcast-style replays add a dramatic flair to the action, as do wrestler managers and wrestler-specific taunts. This excellent experience truly captures the apex of the WCW/nWo rivalry and the excitement, action, and strategy involved in pro wrestling. As Scott Hall would probably proclaim, "One more for the good guys!"

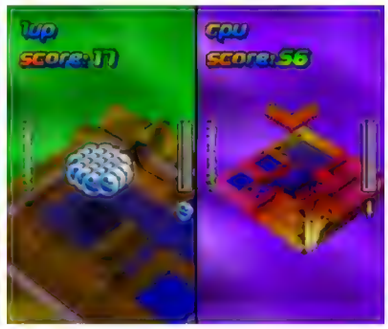
Reflections: *WCW/nWo* Revenge improves on *WCW vs. nWo: World Tour* in nearly every way. The graphics received a much-needed coat of paint, and everything animates brilliantly in the more robust and nuanced gameplay engine. Major props to AKI for including small yet vital animations and moves for individual wrestlers: Booker T performs his charismatic "Spinaroonie," Randy Savage bellows out his famous "Oh yeah," and Chris Jericho's arrogant pin attempt is in here! Sting and La Parka even start matches with their associated weaponry, and Sting descends from the rafters when it's his turn to enter Battle Royal. Including ringside managers like Rick Rude, Kimberly, Miss Elizabeth, and Sonny Onoo also adds to the authenticity. Suffice it to say, *WCW/nWo Revenge* perfectly encapsulates the best of WCW when it was winning TV's "Monday Night Wars" against WWF. Watching that aforementioned opening cinematic never fails to give me chills, even all these years later. – DK

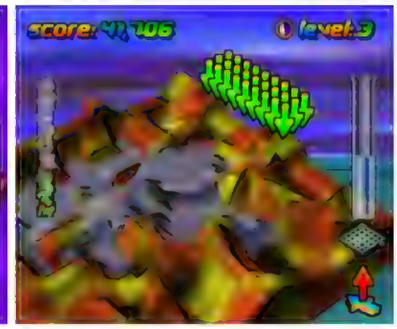
European Cartridge

Wetrix

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: June 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Zed Two Game Design Studio
Publisher: Ocean Software (NA, PAL), Imagineer (JP)
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

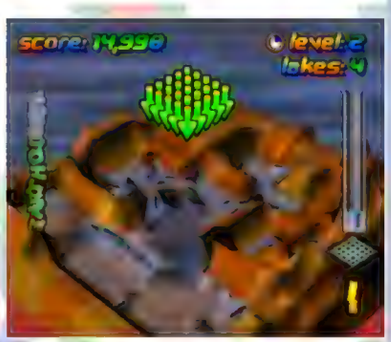






Players are tasked to build dams around a squared isometric board to contain water for as long as possible in this fast-paced puzzle title. Blocks known as uppers fall from the sky at random locations. Players must rotate and position them around the board to create barriers and self-contained valleys. Before long, water droplets will rain down from the sky, filling these gaps with liquid. If there's a hole in the board or an uncontained depression, water will pour off the screen and slowly fill a drainage meter. If that meter overflows, it's game over. Items occasionally fall to help or hinder progress, including downers that reduce the height of walls, bombs that blow holes in the floor, fireballs that dry up patches of water, and ice blocks that freeze lakes to stop them from draining temporarily. If too many walls are placed on the board, it causes an earthquake, which reduces lakes to rubble and can end the round. The further things progress, the faster that shapes and items drop. High scores are awarded for creating multiple lakes, stretching water across the board to create a rainbow, or making deep pools that attract rubber duckies. Judging where each piece's shadow falls in relation to the ground can be difficult, as the camera is zoomed close to the action, often causing fatal mistakes. It is best to start in practice mode to get a feel for the mechanics and speed; in the main mode, the action never lets up. A challenge option gives the player a set time amount to play to amass a high score or a set number of pieces that will drop. There is also a pro difficulty mode, which speeds up the experience dramatically, and a two-player battle mode for added longevity. This puzzler is well-built, unique, and truly interesting to play, provided players don't mind the fast pace and are willing to invest the time to practice before playing.

Reflections: *Wetrix* has the potential to be amazing. The unhelpful camera angle and high speeds can ruin a playthrough in a matter of seconds, though, making frustration a big part of the experience. I also found that when the drainage meter started to fill, my next few "random" drops were often water, which (obviously) didn't do me any favors. These aspects were improved upon in the PlayStation 2 sequel *Aqua Aqua*, making it a fairer and more enjoyable game overall. I don't usually gravitate toward puzzle games, but *Wetrix* had me coming back for just one more round time and time again. – JE



European Cartridge

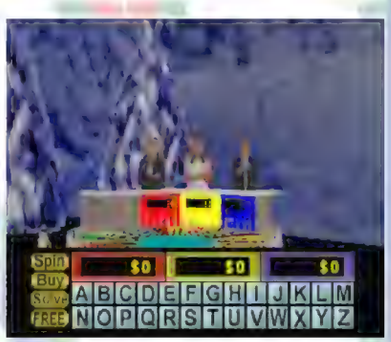
Japanese Cartridge

Wheel of Fortune

Genre: Game Show, Puzzle
Release Date: Nov. 1997
Region: NA
Developer: GameTek
Publisher: Take-Two Interactive
Players: 1-3 (simultaneous)
Features: Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

This adaptation of the long-running television game show has three contestants spinning a roulette-style wheel full of cash and prize wedges, then picking consonants as they attempt to solve a Hangman-style word puzzle. Correct letter guesses increase contestants' earnings based on where they landed on the wheel. Landing on the dreaded Bankrupt wedge will knock that contestant's profits back to zero. Contestants may also purchase a vowel for $250. Landing on Bankrupt or guessing a letter that isn't part of the puzzle will end the turn. If a contestant solves the puzzle, they keep all of their earnings. The third round is the Jackpot Round and starts at $5,000, with the jackpot increasing with the amount of each spin. Contestants receive the pot if they land on that wedge, choose a letter in the puzzle, and solve the puzzle in the same turn. The final round is the Bonus Round, with the highest-earning contestant trying to solve a timed puzzle starting with the letters RSTLNE. They then choose three additional consonants and one vowel and hope that completes enough of the phrase to hint at the correct answer. The presentation is serviceable, with music and swooping camera angles that resemble the broadcast presentation of the show. Host Pat Sajak is absent, but Vanna White is present in full motion video and digitized forms. However, fans of the show may notice that Ms. White simply walks by the tiles and doesn't touch them to reveal a letter. Up to three players can choose from six digitized characters to play a game with multiple lengths and difficulty options. Each player may use their own controller or share one controller to pass around. A save feature would have been welcomed, especially for high-score chasers, but otherwise, this is a serviceable turn of the wheel.

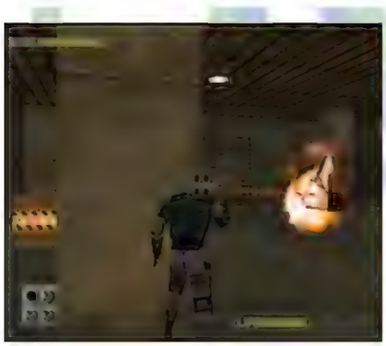
Reflections: Pat Sajak is nowhere to be found here, which seems to be true with most *Wheel of Fortune* video games. However, Ms. White not touching the tiles is simply an example of lazy game design. An exciting feature in the PlayStation version of *Wheel of Fortune* is its compatibility with a memory card. This neat idea ensures that puzzles wouldn't repeat until they were all exhausted. Despite the lack of a comparable feature, this wasn't a problem in the N64 version. I played hundreds of rounds without a repeated puzzle. However, it would have been reassuring to know I wasn't trying to solve a puzzle I'd already completed. – MV



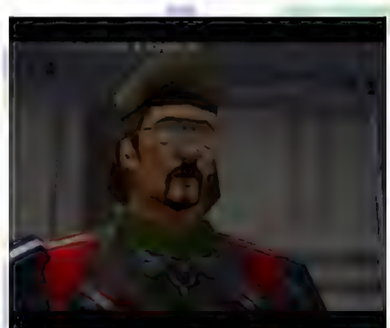
WinBack: Covert Operations

Operation: WinBack (EU)
WinBack (JP)
Genre: Third-Person Shooter
Release Date: Sept. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Omega Force
Publisher: Koei (JP, NA), Virgin Interactive (PAL)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Feat.: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

In this third-person shooter title, players take on the role of Jean-Luc, secret operations specialist for the Strategic Covert Actions Team (SCAT). Armed with a pistol, shotgun, and submachine gun, the player must infiltrate the facility being held by the terrorist group Crying Lions. They have commandeered an orbital satellite weapon and are holding the world at ransom. Jean-Luc can cling to walls with a tap of the A button for cover-based gunfights. Locking onto an enemy with C-down assists with auto-aim, but a flick of the control stick allows for manual shooting. The cover gimmick is unique as the player can hug a surface and use C-left and C-right to move the camera to scope out the battlefield. Melee attacks are also present for an instant knockout should the player be stealthy enough in their approach. The controls feel stiff and clunky; having multiple foes on-screen can confuse the auto-aim as it does not change to a more immediate threat, causing inescapable damage. At the beginning of each stage, Jean-Luc has an objective to attain, such as powering a lift or reaching a certain door. Boss fights also occur as separate isolated stages, each enemy having a weapon specialty, such as a rocket launcher or flamethrower. Health packs and ammo are liberally sprinkled throughout and can also be found hidden in destructible crates. Some levels are sprawling, whereas others are only a few rooms, affecting the pacing and flow. The simple puzzle elements rely on maneuvering through laser fields, finding switches to unlock new areas, and blowing up power boxes to disable electric fencing. There are a plethora of characters and enemy bosses that all resemble the cast of an anime show. None are explained or given any backstory, but the dialogue and corny cutscenes suggest the player should know more about them. The graphics are drab, and the soundtrack is forgettable. Six multiplayer modes are present: Death Match, Cube Hunt, Quick Draw, Team Battle, and Point Match. The modes do not offer much excitement aside from Cube Hunt, where players must collect all the colored cubes to win while engaging each other in combat. If players can manage the cumbersome controls and camera issues, there is some interesting covert action to be had.



Reflections: *WinBack* is a bizarre title, as, on the one hand, it could have potentially been the Nintendo 64's answer to *Metal Gear Solid*, but in reality, it is the dollar store version. That isn't to say that *WinBack* is not fun – it absolutely has some bright spots and is a competent shooter. It just shows its hand after the first ten minutes and never deviates from that path. Good job putting a cover-based system in place, as it works well until the clunky controls hamper it. The story and dialogue in the cutscenes are pure action movie drivel, but it made me laugh on more than one occasion, so if you decide to pick this title up for any reason, make it this! – JE



European Cartridge
Operation: WinBack

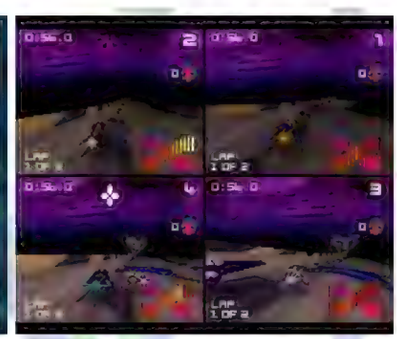
Japanese Cartridge
WinBack

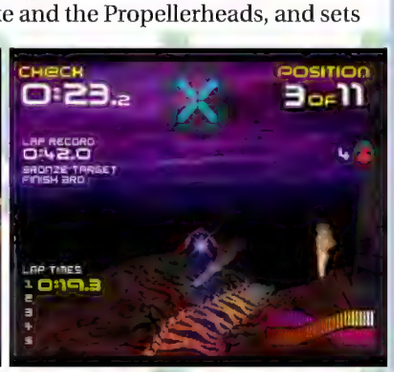
Wipeout 64

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Psygnosis
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Surf the air in an anti-gravity craft! Speed, precision driving, and weapons are the keys to success in this futuristic 3D racing game played in a third- or optional first-person perspective. Controls are tight and responsive, which is very welcome when dealing with such speed and mayhem while hitting checkpoints and running laps, and the smooth framerate acts as a well-greased conduit for the racers that vary in speed, handling, shield, etc. If players do not master the air brake system and bounce off the walls, they will slow down significantly, lose shield strength, and eventually blow up. Driving over the pit lane recharges shields but requires a slight detour. The standard modes of Single Race, Time Trial, and Multiplayer are here, but Challenge Mode is where the pace gets turned up. Challenge Mode consists of three categories (Race, Time Trial, Weapon) of six individual challenges each, with predetermined courses and racing teams. The Race challenges require crossing the finish line in at least third place to advance and include weapons in every other challenge to help out. This mode can be difficult when weapons are disabled and requires fast reflexes to hit the speed-ups while avoiding hitting anything else. Time Trial challenges give one lap to achieve a specific time to advance. This mode has no other racers, allowing the player to concentrate on driving. Be prepared for some training because avoiding almost all slowdowns is needed to earn even a bronze lap time in most races. Weapon challenges are fun and less taxing than the other two categories since crossing the finish line is optional. The goal is simple – blow up enough opponents, however possible, to move on. Weapon pickups on tracks vary for each challenge, so anything from mines and rockets to electricity bolts and earthquakes is fair game, as are shields and auto-pilot. Players who score a bronze award in all challenges unlock the Super Combo challenges, a mashup of Race and Weapon challenges. Graphic details are less impressive, with uninteresting backgrounds and a rather obvious (and short) drawing distance. Thankfully, the camera is reliable, and the track visibility is good. The soundtrack is decent, featuring licensed titles from Fluke and the Propellerheads, and sets the overall tone. Experience variety suffers, as there are only seven tracks to race on, but four different speed classes and different play modes with unique objectives and weapons extend interest. Those looking for crazy-fast, tough-as-nails weaponized action should race to try this out.

Reflections: The Wipeout game series originated on MS-DOS computers and the PlayStation in 1995, where it was a launch title in Europe and North America. The franchise still has installments decades later, but *Wipeout 64* was the only series release not to come to a Sony console. This title is addictive but very difficult. The racing and visual style reminds me of *F-Zero X*, just without all the weapons. I prefer having weapons, so I particularly enjoyed trying different methods of carnage to achieve the Weapons challenges, like driving backward or sitting on a power-up. – BC





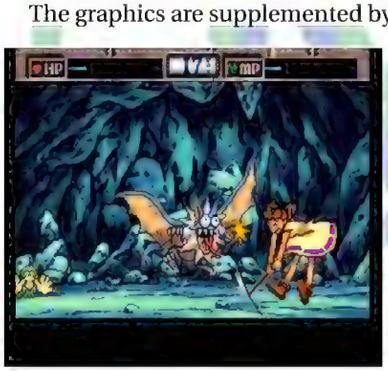
European Cartridge

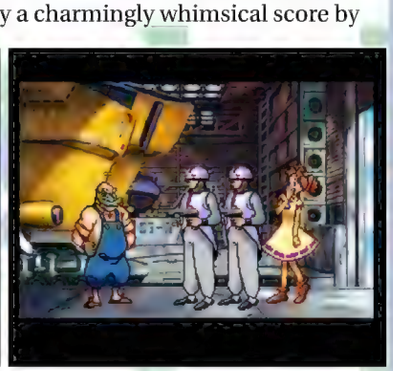
Wonder Project J2: Koruro no Mori no Josette

[Wonder Project J2: Josette of Corlo Forest]
Genre: Simulation, Adventure
Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: JP
Developer: Givro
Publisher: Enix
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆☆

Island newcomer Josette is a gijin (robot) disguised as a young girl and is the last hope for the islanders escaping the wrath of the Siliconian Empire in this sequel to the Super Famicom's *Wonder Project J*. Josette was not fully programmed when she departed for the island of Megafloat Noah, and at the start is incapable of imitating human emotions and performing everyday tasks like cooking and cleaning. Most of these discoverable tasks and emotions are laid out as 25 achievements tracked as Josette's journey progresses, and she becomes acquainted with the amiable townsfolk. The core gameplay is a point-and-click-based 2D adventure. A mechanical bird serves as the cursor to drag objects from the bottom of the interface that Josette can interact with, such as operational books that can be purchased that will teach Josette how to operate machinery and learn human anatomy. Josette may not initially understand some of these tasks and may playfully throw items across the room. Repeated interactions with objects are required for Josette to realize the item is pertinent – she will then read and learn books or properly use a mop. In extreme instances, Josette will sometimes consider costly operational manuals as nourishment and devour them, so saving often may be critical in trial-and-error situations. Josette has HP/MP EKG meters representing her health and mental levels, respectively. They will start maxed out at blue, then progress to yellow and red, indicating she must quickly recharge back home or risk a currency penalty. Josette can earn more income by registering for jobs like a waitress, fisherman, mechanic, and miner. Some jobs, like waiting tables, happen automatically with no gameplay required, while others, like mining, implement the existing point-and-click interface. Other gameplay diversions switch graphics to 3D environments, like when Josette goes underwater fishing or when she shoots down uncrewed aircraft in the sky. While these 3D visuals are relatively basic, the 2D environments and anime character sprites are vibrant, with Josette full of zest in her lively animations. The graphics are supplemented by a charmingly whimsical score by Akihiko Mori. Minus annoying trial-and-error segments that will test players' tolerance, it is worth it to experience Josette's astounding journey of self-discovery and the significant relationships she cultivates.

Reflections: Throughout *Wonder Project J2*, Josette regularly acknowledges the player and randomly asks personal yes/no questions during gameplay with amusing responses. Leaving Josette idle will also result in some fun anecdotes. Without going deep into spoilers, the final gameplay portion is a tricky beast that severely punishes upon failure. Still, the developers make it worthwhile with a nearly hour-long ending that... goes places. Finally, don't overlook the shop item, "Bad Book," which isn't as devious as it sounds and instead has Josette acting as a Dungeon Master in an adorable mini-role-playing adventure. – DK



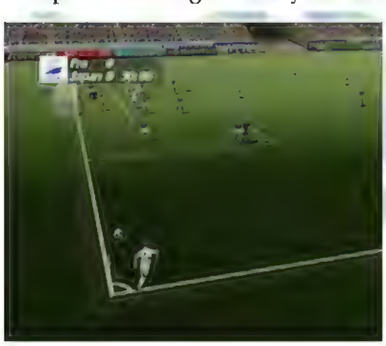


World Cup 98

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Electronic Arts Canada, Software Creations
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

Join 40 international soccer teams for the biggest sporting event in the world. Up to four players can battle it out for the prestigious Jules Rimet trophy in World Cup mode, practice with Friendly matches, or trade strikes in Penalty Kick Shoot-out. Once players win a World Cup, they unlock World Cup Classics mode, featuring eight famous matches of yesteryear. There is a fast and frantic arcade pace with a side-on view and broadcast perspective, and several camera angles are available to change the action. The emphasis is on performing skill moves with a press of a C-button and a flick of the analog stick. Feints, one-two passes, and ball dribble skills are all easy to pull off when pushing forward to the goal. Players can also defend with blocks and slide tackles, which rarely miss the target when going in for a challenge. Shooting feels fast and fun, with some over-the-top goals, but the keepers are also up for the challenge, pulling off some incredible saves. Participant names and football kits are all present and correct for each team, but athlete likenesses are lacking outside of skin color and hairstyle. English stalwarts Des Lynam and John Motson provide presentation and commentary, which adds credibility to mimicking the television broadcast style. There are many options to choose from, including the ability to customize existing players and a helpful radar on screen so the player can see where teammates are on the pitch. Without the radar, a giant yellow arrow on-screen points to the closest squad member. Team tactics can also be customized, with options for up to three formations and three strategies that can be activated on the fly during matches. The soccer on display here is excellent, but the package as a whole is pretty shallow. Despite all the kits, authentic stadiums, weather effects, trivia during halftime, and music intro by Chumbawamba, there is not much on offer; outside of the World Cup mode and the classic matches, there is little to give the game longevity. Getting a few friends over for some four-player action is the best way to get more out of its otherwise lackluster replay value. This worldly experience is a good footy recreation, even if it lacks overall content.

Reflections: Considering *FIFA: Road to World Cup 98* was only released six months prior, *World Cup 98* is essentially a slightly faster version missing dozens of league teams. Having never played the N64 version before, I am pleasantly surprised at how well it plays. Of course, EA does tend to milk their licenses (and us consumers) dry, and this version is the epitome of that. Stripping half of the previous game's content, tweaking a few little pieces, and slapping a full-whack price tag on it was pretty scandalous. The upshot is that it plays well for being so incomplete! Just a shame they get away with it so often, releasing "legacy" versions that are nearly identical, save for updated teams. – JE



European Cartridge

World Driver Championship

Genre: Racing
Release Date: June 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Boss Game Studios
Publisher: Midway Home Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆☆

Hit the road from one of over 30 unlicensed-yet-luxurious, revved-up machines in this first- or third-person GT racing simulator. While the cars don't sport any official manufacturer branding, motor enthusiasts should be able to decipher they were inspired by models from prestige companies like Mercedes, Porsche, and Lotus. These rides can be driven in 10 worldwide courses ranging from Lisbon, Portugal, to Kyoto, Japan. Each stage has multiple variants with different parts of the track available, or they can be raced in reverse for added variety. Each set of wheels has ratings for top speed, acceleration, handling, and weight. The sim-racing gameplay has a refreshingly realistic feeling where clean racing is encouraged, and aggressively bumping rivals will cause frustrating spinouts that lead to falling behind the pack. Putting time in Quick Race mode will serve as a fine way to adapt to each vehicle's driving physics and unique handling. Two Player Vs. mode features split-screen racing against a friend and two AI competitors. The initial cars available intentionally have a sluggish feeling on the road, necessitating investing time into Championship mode to unlock the higher-rated cars. Championship starts the player as an upstart driver ranked #30 in the GT2 racing league, with offers from two teams to drive for them. Drivers will then pick a cup to compete in that consists of a handful of races, and they will come out of each cup with points based on placement. Those points will accumulate and consequently result in moving up the ranks and unlocking better-performing rides and competing offers from more resourceful teams before ultimately moving on to the GT1 league, where the elite competition awaits. Progressing through the Championship mode is satisfying when gaining access to the top cars and coming out with a podium finish against the increasingly difficult opposition. There is only one third-person camera option, but one hurdle with that is when racing up certain inclines, the player's vehicle will block the road in front of them, which can frustratingly result in unforeseen collisions with rivals. The scenery and cars look impressive, and the sound effects of revving engines and tires screeching are spot on, but the forgettable rock tunes seem out of place. If players can tolerate unlicensed cars and an occasionally troublesome camera, then an enjoyable sim-racing outing awaits them.

Reflections: I put many hours into the Championship mode, and while grinding away with weaker cars can be a slog to start with, the reward is worth it when finally having access to more formidable speedsters. These gorgeous wheels can be admired in post-race replays that feature television-quality camera angles and can be saved on a Controller Pak, too, but at the expense of taking up the entire memory of the Pak. There is a high-resolution option for letterboxed graphics, but unlike most other Nintendo 64 games with this feature, this one surprisingly doesn't require the Expansion Pak. *World Driver Championship* received plenty of buzz upon arrival, but there would never be a sequel. – DK

European Cartridge

The World Is Not Enough

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Release Date: Oct. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆

British secret agent James Bond's 19th feature film inspires this 3D first-person shooter. The plot, characters, and locations (e.g., London, Kazakhstan) closely mirror the film, making it an excellent tie-in for fans of the franchise. Bond utilizes a wide range of high-tech weaponry, including his trusty P2K handgun, other pistols, shotgun, rifles, machine guns, wristwatch-based weapons, gadgets, and more, to assist in his mission to stave off a nuclear terrorist attack. In single-player mode, Bond must work his way through 14 missions of increasing difficulty to rescue nuclear physicist Christmas Jones and the world at large. Whether navigating the labyrinthian halls of the MI-6 HQ, skiing down snowy mountains, or slinking around a submarine, the variety of scenery is one of its strong suits. A notification appears when each mission objective has been met (such as collecting equipment and rescuing hostages), and the mission ends when all goals are completed. Success requires a combination of problem-solving, stealth maneuvering, and sharpshooting. All of these elements are well integrated throughout for a varied affair. The three available skill levels allow all players a chance to enjoy the action, whether they are an experienced shot or simply looking for an easygoing time. While the single-player story mode is a bit on the short side, it succeeds with its combination of intuitive controls and well-designed, creative levels. However, below-average enemy AI and lack of total freedom in accomplishing objectives disappoint. Although the missions are fun, what really shines is the multiplayer mode. Between two and four competitors can participate in any of the eight multiplayer scenarios, including Capture the Flag, King of the Hill, Arena (deathmatch), Last Agent Standing, and more. Additionally, there are various play options to take on opponents, such as only allowing explosives, close-range weapons, or automatic weapons. The Expansion Pak enhances the graphics and colors, but the gameplay does not suffer if not used. With a fun and engaging single-player campaign alongside a deep and well-thought-out multiplayer mode, fans of the James Bond franchise and first-person shooters should have more than enough.

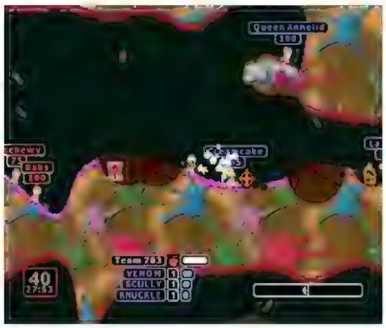
Reflections: Is it possible to write a review of *The World Is Not Enough* without mentioning its Nintendo 64 predecessor, *GoldenEye 007*? Probably, but it won't be this one. *GoldenEye* is an undeniable classic and a groundbreaking title for the N64. So why isn't the next entry in the franchise spoken about in the same breath? They are comparable in gameplay mechanics, story mode enjoyment, and the crucial multiplayer mode many fans of *GoldenEye* cite as the primary nostalgic touchpoint. A 2000 release date, which was later in the console's lifecycle, combined with anticipation for the next-gen consoles, might be to blame. However, that should not keep gamers from trying out this title. Plus, you can get it in a blue cartridge! – JBr

European Cartridge

NA Gray Variant Cartridge

Worms Armageddon

Genre: Action, Strategy
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Team17 Software
Ported by: Infogrames Lyon House
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1-4
Features: Game Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆☆☆☆



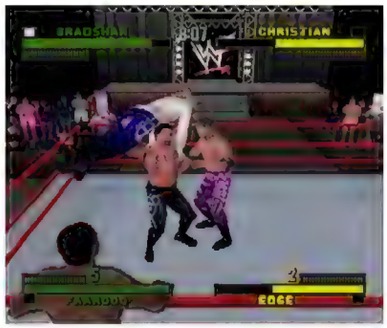
Brace for impact! Team17's firepower-festooned earthworms go ballistic in turn-based combat. Worms, typically four to six per team, are arranged on a cartoony 2D landscape in myriad themes, from twisted gardens and sandy islands to bowls of fruit and piles of chemistry vials. A minimal interface displays worm names and health, wind direction/speed, team energy, and turn/round timers. Players take alternating, sequential timed turns as one of their team's worms, attempting to eliminate foes using weapons from their arsenal. A handy sliding menu, opened with the R button, displays the offensive options available to the player. Some conventional choices, such as the Bazooka and Grenade, use an artillery-style firing method where the player must carefully choose the angle and force necessary to hit their target. Others, like the Super Sheep or Fire Punch, provide fun and unique ways to devastate the opposition. Utility equipment, like the Girder and Ninja Rope, give players tools to traverse the terrain and find optimal positions for their worms. Crates occasionally parachute down, providing health, ammo, or temporary abilities. Single-player features four modes of play. Quickstart drops the player into a match against the CPU. Deathmatch tracks player statistics and allows ranking up through rounds, increasing the challenge with each promotion. Training gives the player specific equipment and a task to complete. Finally, Missions combine fierce opposition and specific victory conditions to create scenarios for players to solve. Multiplayer lets one to four human or CPU teams battle upon random, defined, or custom-generated terrain. A bevy of options includes two control schemes, turn time limits, round time, toggling worm movement, donor cards, fall damage, and much more. A team creator allows players to craft a lineup of six worms, including team name, worm names, voice pack, team special weapon, gravestone, and flag. Worms protesting in various dialects as they careen off colorful cliffs is always a good time, and the expressive sprites pair nicely with the sounds of mayhem. The multiplayer turns this from good to great, so gather some friends and prepare for an evening of infectious laughter and immolated invertebrates!

Reflections: The Worms series has been a strong choice for riotous, friendly-rivalry gaming for decades, and this entry is no exception. In 2018, the developers called *Worms Armageddon* "an important part of Team17 history." If you plan on partying with this edition of Worms, fire it up early! Creating teams for Multiplayer is time-consuming, and friends won't always enjoy waiting. On the plus side, imagine watching their wormy namesake being blown to smithereens by a sheep! The PAL version is easier to obtain, but be prepared to break the bank for a North American cartridge, as *Worms Armageddon* is one of the system's pricier titles. – DG

European Cartridge

WWF Attitude

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Aug. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Dev.: Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆



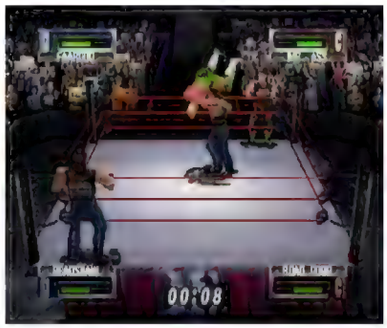
WWF's biggest stars return to the professional wrestling ring in this sequel to the previous year's *WWF War Zone*. The action takes place via an elevated camera perspective that sits right in front of the ring. Players enter the squared circle and use a combination of punches, kicks, running moves, throws, and advanced moves like neckbreakers and suplexes in an attempt to wear their opponents' health down to zero. At this point, nearly any maneuver will score a win via pin or submission. Each wrestler also has a trademark move available in addition to their finishing move, both executed via a series of button presses that can, unfortunately, be sensitive to being recognized during battle. Just try smashing out LEFT, RIGHT, DOWN, C-left to pull off The Rock's Rock Bottom when an opponent is relentlessly attacking. The roster is 40 male and female wrestlers strong, ranging from top stars like The Undertaker and Steve Austin to the late Owen Hart, midcarders like Val Venis, and even a limbless version of Al Snow's Head. The Create-a-Wrestler mode is available to build a custom grappler, complete with decals, tattoos, logos, and lettering options. Noteworthy match types include the Survivor Series and Stable elimination modes. However, the real highlight is the single-player Career mode that marches a wrestler through a full season to capture the European, Intercontinental, and WWF titles. The mode has a detailed calendar layout of upcoming shows and does a fine job implementing the many match variations. Don't expect cutscenes or storylines to set up heated rivalries, though. It's a grind to earn the top ranking for each title, but unlocking hidden wrestlers and other secrets is worth it. Many wrestlers retain excellent character models and motion-captured animations from *War Zone*, but some of the new wrestlers look stiff and dull by comparison. The frustrating control scheme somewhat holds back the in-ring experience, but this is a worthy wrestling follow-up with an improved core single-player mode, a big bump in roster size, and new character-creation options.

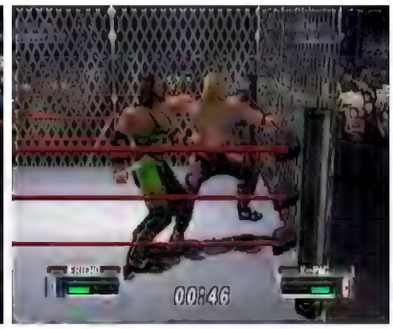
Reflections: Acclaim's license with WWF expired a few months after *WWF Attitude*'s release. Having to rush the title to shelves is perhaps one of the reasons why the sequel added new features but failed to fix existing issues. THQ would then take over the WWF rights and quickly announce new wrestling games developed with AKI, the first of which would be released a few months after *Attitude*. This release receives the dubious honor of being the lame duck wrestling title, as bigger and better things were in store for WWF video game fans the following holiday season. – DK

European Cartridge

WWF No Mercy

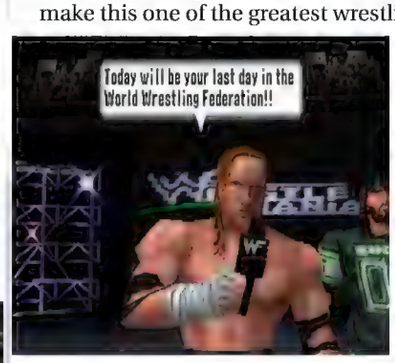
Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: AKI Corporation, Asmik Ace Entertainment
Publisher: THQ
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆





The WWF Superstars have gone extreme and hold nothing back in this aptly titled pro wrestling sequel to *WWF Wrestlemania 2000.* 74 WWF talents make up the roster, from main eventers like The Undertaker, The Rock, and Kurt Angle to unlockable curiosities like ring announcer Howard Finkel, old women's wrestler Mae Young, and commentator Jim Ross. They will wrestle from a ringside camera that usually looks down onto the ring. Fine-tuned controls make it so first-time players will find welcoming fundamentals to grasp, while regulars will constantly refine their nuanced strategies. When matches begin, starting with A and B button taps is advisable to attempt quick strikes (basic punches/kicks) and grapple attacks (straightforward bodyslams/suplexes), respectively. After dealing some damage with this initial barrage, players can attempt to connect with stronger versions by holding these buttons down. The C-buttons perform actions like running attacks/grapples (clotheslines and Tornado DDTs), leaping acrobatic maneuvers (Missile Dropkicks and Moonsaults), and retrieving weapons (from chairs to Kendo sticks) to assault opponents with. The variety of moves available to characters per situation is deep, including turnbuckle moves, counters, taunts, and ground attacks/submissions. With continued offensive success, the on-screen Attitude Meter will rise until maxing out and flashing "SPECIAL," indicating when a wrestler's signature move can be used, like Mankind's Mandible Claw or Edge's Downward Spiral. Matches can spill outside the ring and into backstage environments such as the locker room, boiler room, and a tavern, complete with a destructible billiards table to slam rivals through gratifyingly.

There are many ways to wreak havoc in and out of the ring. High-risk ladder matches have the objective of grabbing a championship belt or briefcase suspended above the ring. Endurance is tested in Iron Man matches, where whoever has the most falls within a time limit of up to an hour will be victorious. Players can take control of the officiating with Guest Referee mode and count pinfalls and countouts as fast or slow as they desire. The Royal Rumble features up to 40 participants who must be eliminated by going over the top rope or via in-ring pin, KO, or submission. Exhibition offers singles, tag team, triple threat, and Steel Cage action. Nearly all these modes can be played with up to four players. Stakes can be raised by putting a championship title on the line. Title belts can be earned in the single-player Championship mode (Hardcore, European, WWF Champion, etc.) to quest after in a series of branching storylines that progress whether players win or lose. Wrestlers will engage in trash talk to set up each match via in-game cinematics. Each championship title's story can be revisited to explore every possible branching path for 100% completion for that quest, resulting in countless hours of replay value. Survival is an extended Royal Rumble against 99 competitors and will unlock more wrestlers and other secrets the longer a player survives. Winning matches earns cash for the Smackdown Mall to unlock extra characters, arenas, costumes, and moves for the meticulous Edit a Superstar mode for creating wrestlers. Finely detailed graphics are spotlighted by lavish TV/PPV venues and wrestlers accurately representing their televised counterparts. Mellow background beats and authentic entrance music (except for The Undertaker's missing theme) round out the audio package. The exceptional gameplay, a wide variety of match variants, deep Championship mode, and successfully capturing the spirit of the WWF "Attitude" era product all combine to make this one of the greatest wrestling games of all time.



Reflections: I have played *WWF No Mercy* every year since its release. For several years, I had a close group of friends I routinely played with, and we even had our own personalized foam title belt we put on the line! I do have a couple of quibbles, like a noticeable yet tolerable slowdown in four-player ladder matches and condensed wrestler entrances. Still, these are minor blemishes in what is otherwise a flawless experience. *No Mercy* was AKI's final N64 release. While they made a couple of wrestling games on the next generation of consoles based on the M.U.S.C.L.E. and DefJam licenses, they never reached the same heights of their unrivaled output of legendary wrestling games on the N64. Note: A rare "-1" NA variant exists, which fixed a random internal battery glitch that could delete the user's data, available via mail through THQ. – DK

European Cartridge

WWF War Zone

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Aug. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Iguana West
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆

Acclaim enters the squared circle with the first licensed World Wrestling Federation game for the Nintendo 64. Choose from one of 16 top WWF wrestlers like "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, Shawn Michaels, and The Rock, or customize one using the Create-a-Wrestler feature. Afterward, step into the ring and get ready to rumble. The action transpires from a slightly elevated camera perspective in front of the ring. The controls require practice, as most advanced slams, holds, and signature maneuvers can only be performed via complex input sequences. For example, press LEFT, LEFT, UP, and B to use Ken Shamrock's chokeslam. Training mode explaining many of these moves is highly recommended. The opponent's health meter slowly whittles down with each attack that connects. The closer it reaches zero, the better the chances of scoring a pinfall or submission victory. It can be a lot to take in at first, but with repetition and frequent references to a moves list on the pause menu, the player may soon get the hang of it. Several single and multiplayer match types can be played with one to four players. Highlights include the no-disqualifications Weapons match and the over-the-top-rope elimination classic Royal Rumble, which is exclusive to the N64 version. The WWF Challenge mode is the primary single-player option, where a wrestler works his way up the rankings to capture the Intercontinental and WWF Championships. Beating this with each of the 16 wrestlers unlocks extra costumes, cheats, and bonus characters, like Cactus Jack and Dude Love (Mankind's alternate personalities). The 3D polygonal wrestlers look strikingly close to their real-life counterparts, and their motion-captured moves add realism. Vince McMahon and Jim Ross provide a hearty amount of energetic commentary, and hearing crowd chants when performing well amplifies the gameplay. A steep learning curve aside, a solid foundation exists for an enjoyable in-ring experience.

Reflections: *WWF War Zone* blew me away when it first arrived in the summer of 1998. Acclaim released it at the perfect time, too. WWF was enjoying a resurgence in popularity thanks to new stars like Steve Austin, Triple H, and The Rock, bringing in droves of new fans. *War Zone* was the first North American wrestling game to have an in-depth custom wrestler creation feature, and I spent countless hours recreating my friends and other wrestlers. This instantly engaging feature helped compensate for the complex gameplay, but increasing competition from THQ's WCW wrestling games set a high bar for Acclaim's future installments. – DK

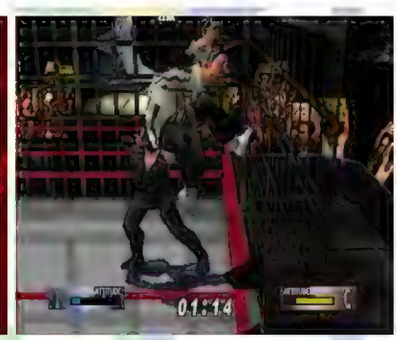
European Cartridge

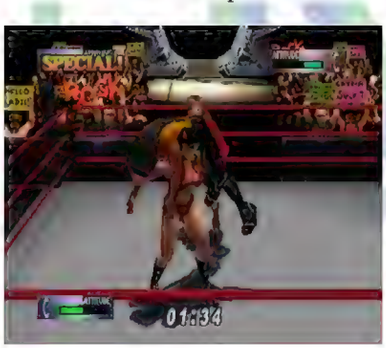
WWF Wrestlemania 2000

Genre: Wrestling
Release Date: Nov. 1999
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: AKI
Publisher: THQ (NA, PAL), Asmik Ace Entertainment (JP)
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Common
☆☆☆☆☆

WWF is fresh into its red-hot "Attitude Era" with headliners like Steve Austin, The Rock, and Triple H, three of the 57 selectable wrestlers in AKI's third wrestling game for the N64. An in-game camera looks down in front of the ring to provide the perfect perspective on the action. Pummel foes with closed fists and other strikes using the B button, and utilize weak/strong grapples by tapping/holding the A button for signature maneuvers like Austin's Lou Thesz Press or his vintage turnbuckle Mudhole Stomping. Attacking from the ropes with clotheslines, high-flying splashes and dives, and ground-based attacks and holds like the Camel Clutch round off the many ways the grapplers can lay waste to each other. Attacks will fill the Attitude meter until it flashes "SPECIAL," allowing the player's chosen wrestler to deliver a finishing move, such as Jeff Jarrett's Stroke or Faarooq's Dominator. The controls naturally lend themselves to landing weaker attacks before going in for stronger attacks that are easier to reverse if attempted too soon. Defensive actions are just as involved and satisfying. Successfully timing L and R button presses will reverse grapples and strikes, respectively. Working through the year-long Road to Wrestlemania career mode is a great way to practice moves and get used to the controls. Across 52 weeks, the competition will increase from lower-tiered talent through tougher ranks and winning all WWF championships before the year ends. An in-depth Create-a-Wrestler mode enables customizing nearly all appearance options, every single move from a wrestler's repertoire, entrance music, preferred ringside weapon, and more. Championship belts can also be created and wagered against friends in up to four-player multiplayer singles, tag team, 3-Way, and Steel Cage matches where whoever escapes first wins. The addicting Royal Rumble match has up to 40 wrestlers that must be eliminated via traditional over-the-top rope throws or by in-ring pins, KOs, or submissions. This deluxe suite of modes, characters, and creation features wonderfully supplements the five-star controls, making this an essential experience for any wrestling fan.

Reflections: To have AKI's acclaimed gameplay engine paired with this beloved era of WWF is extraordinary. The killer presentation of the product is highlighted with yet another adrenaline-pumping intro cinematic, King of the Ring branded tournaments, faithfully detailed wrestlers, animated moves, adorably rugged stills from entrance videos, and authentic entrance music. *WWF Wrestlemania 2000* really is everything you could want from a WWF game. Pro-tip: Avoid losing any tag team matches in Road to Wrestlemania, or your hand-picked partner will turn on you and be permanently replaced with a weaker wrestler. Trust me, you don't want Meat as your ally! – DK





European Cartridge

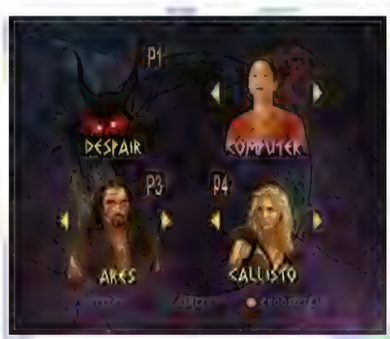
Japanese Cartridge

Xena: Warrior Princess – The Talisman of Fate

Xena: Warrior Princess (EU)
Genre: Fighting
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Saffire
Publisher: Titus
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

As decreed by the Fates, Xena must assemble a team of fighters for a contest to determine who will claim the powerful Talisman of Fate from Despair, the champion of the evil Dahak. This 3D arena-based fighting experience has multiple modes: a basic Quest mode, where one player fights through a lineup of warriors; Versus mode for one-on-one bouts; and Roster mode, where defeated opponents are replaced mid-fight. The optional Practice mode shows player button input on the screen, supports up to four players, and allows changing the state of the computer opponents during the session, which is great for getting warmed up to combat. A selection of ten fighters, both heroes and villains, are available initially, including the central crew from the series – Xena, Gabrielle, and Joxer – plus recurring characters like Caesar, Ares, Autolycus, and Ephiny. Fighters carry either a sword or a staff and can slash, leap, punch, and kick, plus use unique special moves like fireballs, throwing blades, combos, and holds. Learning these may require a guide, though most work by pressing a direction on the analog stick with one of the C-buttons. (For example, pressing away from an opponent, then forward and C-left throws Xena's trademark chakram.) The number of techniques is a little low, but this also allows anyone to start playing quickly. The devilish-looking final boss created just for this game, Despair, is unlockable upon completion of Quest mode. Up to four alternate outfits are available for most characters, helping to differentiate players who select the same character. The arenas vary in size and look fine while maintaining a good framerate. The characters strongly resemble their television show counterparts, which is essential for a tie-in title like this. The options include settings for difficulty, rounds, controls, and more. The rest of the experience is neither outstanding nor bad: the controls are serviceable, the music is passable, and the camera works. This fighting title lacks variety or unique features, but it will likely be fun for *Xena* fans.

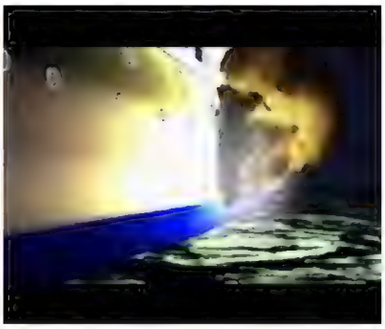
Reflections: *Talisman of Fate* is not a fantastic fighting game. Fortunately, it is one of Titus' better titles (the studio has a well-deserved reputation for some awful games in this era). Although I sometimes saw *Xena*'s sister series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, I watched *Xena: Warrior Princess* more. Xena was more memorable as a character, having a distinctive costume, weapon, battle cry, and arguably more interesting sidekicks. The Xena character eventually became more popular than Hercules, so it is fitting that she received the superior game. Today, the *Xena* show is remembered fondly by fans, thanks in part to the generally good behavior of its star Lucy Lawless, compared to *Hercules*' more contentious lead actor. – KN

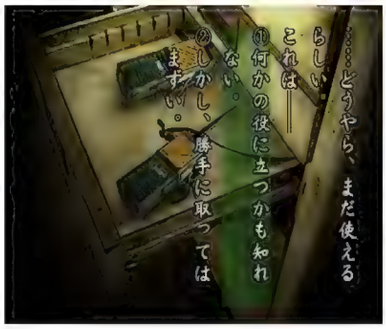


European Cartridge
Xena: Warrior Princess

Yakōchū II: Satsujin Kōro

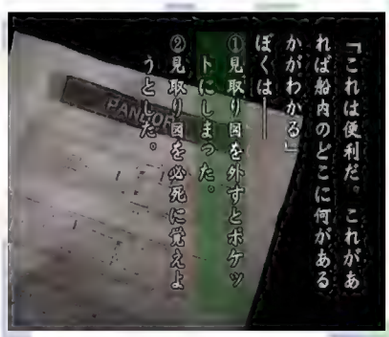
[Sea Sparkle II: Murder Cruise]
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: Oct. 1999
Regions: JP
Developer: Athena
Publisher: Athena
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Rare
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

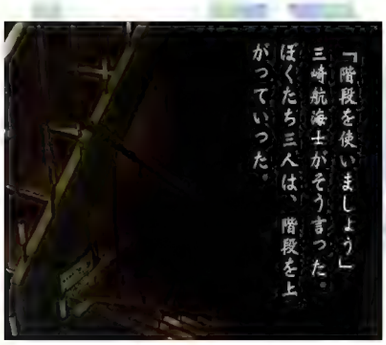


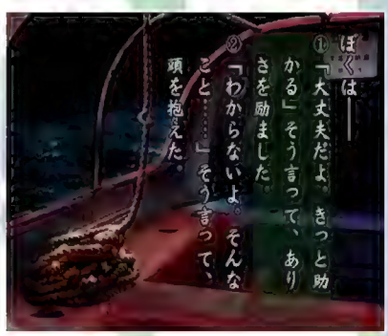


An explosion aboard the luxury liner *Dynasty* forces passengers to abandon the ship. Some take refuge on *Pandora*, a seemingly abandoned vessel that emerges from the mists – where an entirely different nightmare unravels aboard. Can Fuwa Takashi, a first-year high school student, solve the mystery? This horror adventure employs visual novel mechanics. Text options are provided on screen when the player must make a story-altering decision, such as choosing where to explore next or deciding to fight or flee from danger. Players may change Fuwa's name, as reflected in the dialog. From there, story text is displayed piece by piece, primarily over still images. Backdrops are a mixture of photography and rendered art, with infrequent animated sequences that set the mood quite well. The L and R buttons toggle between focusing on the background or the text, which can be helpful when the latter is harder to read during some scenes. The cast includes some figures with intertwining backstories, including Fuwa's childhood friend Arisa (who follows him along as they investigate) and other *Dynasty* evacuees with personal and professional entanglements. The wrong choices can spell doom for Fuwa, so players may encounter unfortunate ends before eventually discovering the villain's identity. Ultimate success hinges on how much information the player can collect, so players must pay extra attention to details along the way to piece together the truth. Ambient environmental sounds and orchestrations ranging from haunting to toe-tapping also contribute to the cinematic vibe. Options include three text speeds, enabling or disabling letterboxing on the backgrounds, and stereo/mono sound. Three save slots allow players to resume their sleuthing at any time. Bonus dialog choices unlock after reaching the correct conclusion, while numerous alternate paths can result in (occasionally humorous) variant endings, adding some replay value. There is solid pacing and a sense of tension to the plot, but shallow mechanics and a glaring lack of character assets water down this otherwise solid horror experience.

Reflections: As a fan of Agatha Christie's Poirot series, I enjoy a good detective story. Getting lost in the intricacies of the bonds between characters is fundamental to the genre. *Yakōchū II: Satsujin Kōro* understands this well and leans into those interpersonal relationships. The crumpled bedsheets and crimson tint effects are all you get for bodies. Anyone's actual appearance is the domain of the reader's imagination. I highly suggest taking notes while playing; the small details picked up along the way are integral to reaching the correct conclusion. The story does not carry on from the previous Yakōchū entry on the Super Famicom, so players can tackle this whodunit without feeling like they've missed the boat. – DG





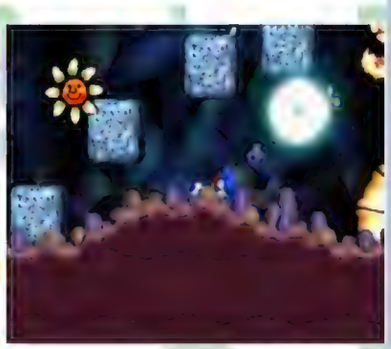


Yoshi's Story

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: Mar. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak
Availability: Very Common
☆☆☆☆

Yoshi pursues his right to happiness in this perky 2D platformer. Baby Bowser has stolen the island's Super Happy Tree, a sapling prized for its euphoria-inducing fruit. Without their daily fix, Yoshi's tribe faces existential ruin, so he and five other colored friends set out to get the tree back, with two more unlockable along the way. This means exploring 24 outrageous stages, hopping and stomping across jungle retreats, steaming catacombs, and wintery peaks while consuming fruit and anything that moves. The Yoshis bubble with innocent charm, yet they pack an elastic tongue that serves as both lasso and vice, slurping any enemy of digestible size. These unlucky foes are converted to eggs that Yoshi can aim and throw at other targets, like bubbles containing fruit. Eggs are also obtained by jumping and punching certain blocks. Moreover, heroes can ground pound the environment to cause minor earthquakes, use an awkward flutter jump to float haphazardly through the air, and sniff out fruit like prehistoric bloodhounds with the R button. Fruit is crucial – levels have no finite end, looping forever until Yoshi's chomped down 30 of them. These treats also boost the dinos' Smile Meter (i.e., life bar) and contribute to an overall stage score. Special Hearts can also be found and unlock additional courses when obtained. Despite the death traps and narcotic subtext, everything is bright and super sweet. Masked Shy Guys hurl snowballs from afar, penguin-like Bumpties bully with pudgy bellies, and inside Bowser's keep, door-wide swords rise to skewer the stubborn survivor. The six lands to play through are depicted as pages within a children's popup book with four courses each. Players are limited to one stage per page (six per game), by which they can stitch a unique story on every playthrough. Trial Mode allows previously completed courses to be replayed. It is not Shakespeare or even Dr. Seuss, but the surreal stylings, from papier-mâché landscapes to yarn and cardboard backdrops, make the journey undeniably endearing. Indeed, the proceedings are alive with childish whimsy. Still, a miserly playtime, squirrely controls (no D-pad support, sadly), and the uneven challenge are not enough to totally dampen the time spent with jovial dinosaur pals.

Reflections: *Yoshi's Story* was criticized upon release because it was shorter, easier, and lacked the nuanced mechanics of its side-scrolling forebear, *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* on the Super NES. Plus, it featured Yoshis who spoke in annoying gibberish, many stages that could be conquered in minutes, and fruit-eating was less satisfying than bounding toward an established goal. In hindsight, Nintendo tried to massage life into a stagnant genre by incorporating an elaborate scoring system, modular narrative, diversified stage design, and an exquisite, experimental art style. Despite the blunders, *Yoshi's Story* sports more personality and takes more risks than anything in the later 2D platformer *New Super Mario Bros.* Start taking notes, Mario. – DA



European Cartridge

Japanese Cartridge

NA "Players Choice" Cartridge

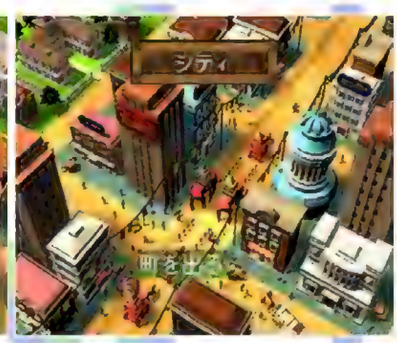
Australian Cartridge

Zool: Majū Tsukai Densetsu

[Zool: Legend of the Magical Beast Tamer]
Genre: RPG
Release Date: June 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Pandora Box
Publisher: Imagineer
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: High
☆☆☆

In this creature-collecting RPG, humans and demon beasts live harmoniously, and some people can befriend these beasts and use them for battle. Join young beast user Leo and his demon beast friend, Bernie, on a worldwide adventure! Leo talks to townspeople, visits new areas, and locates items to trigger cutscenes that look like visual novels. Most characters are represented only by text, portraits, and settings by backdrop illustrations, all well-drawn in an anime watercolor style. Towns are pre-rendered stills with a cursor to choose buildings to visit, which include homes, shops, taverns, and more. On the overworld, Leo walks as a 2D sprite in third-person 3D environments, agonizingly slowly, to towns and dungeons (thankfully, later on, towns have instant transport services). Only a section can be seen and explored at once, and walking over the edge loads the next map piece, though eventually, invisible walls awkwardly mark the world's end. Dungeons, such as forest mazes, canyons, and buildings, are separate areas but function like the overworld. Terrain, like grasslands, forests, sand, etc., determines the battle backdrop and helps or hinders beasts depending on their element. Random encounters open a battle screen in a fixed diagonal perspective with enemy beasts at the top, sometimes accompanied by a human leader. Attack animations show action, and bouncing numbers indicate damage, but no one moves position. Beasts auto-battle by themselves; Leo may give commands with the C-buttons, but this consumes instruction points, represented by a meter of musical notes. Guilt-free default auto-battling relieves the "grinding" of RPG gameplay and allows casual players to get through while allowing more skilled players to progress faster with effective strategies. If Leo wins the battle, sometimes he can convince a beast to join him. Up to four beasts can be in Leo's party, with four more in reserves while adventuring. Far more can go into storage, which Leo may manage from a center in most towns. There are many beasts to collect with different elemental alignments, but they are blurry sprites with overabundant palette swaps. Bosses are usually human beast users, and their battles are like the others, adding nothing special besides dialogue sequences before and after. The graphics, setting, and gameplay primarily evoke the 16-bit era, although the awkward attempts to combine 2D and 3D elements don't partner quite as well as Leo and Bernie themselves.

Reflections: Due to "R/L" pronunciation in Japanese, *Zool* (ズール) might also be called *Zoor* in translation. Considering the lack of Nintendo 64 RPGs, it's surprising that *Zoor* didn't succeed in Japan. However, this title had little chance as a contender among creature-collecting franchises. It is difficult to decipher what the monsters are actually supposed to be, and besides that, they have no personality – a critical flaw in this genre. These beasts could never be turned into adorable, marketable plushies. – KN



Not For Resale Cartridges

Not For Resale, or "NFR" cartridges, were supplied to retailers for public display, usually set up on kiosks for play. Consumers had a chance to sample titles before they bought them, as well as sample upcoming releases. Retailers would sometimes receive final commercial cartridges for use in these kiosks, which usually had a sticker on the back of the cartridge noting it was "not for resale," "demo game only." and the "property of Nintendo." However, the majority of these kiosk cartridges were produced specially for retailers with unique labels noting they were "NOT FOR RESALE," with some even containing different content than their respective consumer cartridge versions. These cartridges are usually a little difficult to find, making them sought after by collectors.

The following section includes the known unique Not For Resale cartridges, noting any differences between the NFR cartridge game and the commercial release.

The below are known NFR cartridges that are regular cartridges with a "NOT FOR RESALE" sticker applied to the back.

Diddy Kong Racing
Donkey Kong 64 (yellow cartridge)
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (gold cartridge)
Mario Party
Super Smash Bros.
Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey
WWF Warzone
WWF Wrestlemania 2000

Sources:
"List of Nintendo 64 Not For Resales" https://nfr.fandom.com/wiki/List_of_Nintendo_64_Not_For_Resales

"Not For Resale carts" http://micro-64.com/database/nfrcarts.shtml

1080° Snowboarding
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Banjo-Kazooie
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Banjo-Tooie
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Diddy Kong Racing
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Donkey Kong 64
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: See below

This NFR version of *Donkey Kong 64* is an early demo that contains the "DK Rap" intro and three levels that include beta content. The first stage is Chunky Kong facing boss Dogadon, the second is a Diddy Kong mine cart stage where the player needs to collect 70 coins to win a golden banana, and the third is another boss fight where Donkey Kong takes on Army Dillo.

Excitebike 64
Developer: Left Field Productions
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: See below

This *Excitebike 64* demo contains minor differences from the final release, and modes and features present in the final release are locked in the menu to prevent access.

Not For Resale Cartridges

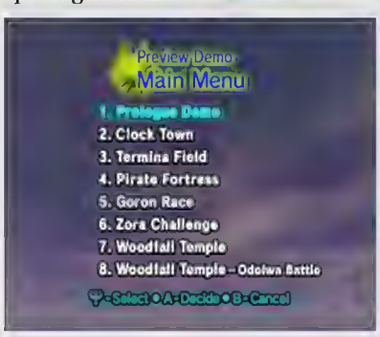
GoldenEye 007
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Jet Force Gemini
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: See below

This NFR cartridge contains a demo of *Jet Force Gemini*, whereby player progression past a certain game point is blocked.

The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (Gray)
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: See below

This NFR version of *Majora's Mask* is an early demo version that contains beta content. It has several different starting points via the main menu for players to sample and explore different areas of the game, including the prologue of the adventure.



The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (Gold)
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Mario Kart 64
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Mario Party 2
Developer: Hudson Soft, CAProduction
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Mario Party 3
Developer: Hudson Soft, CAProduction
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

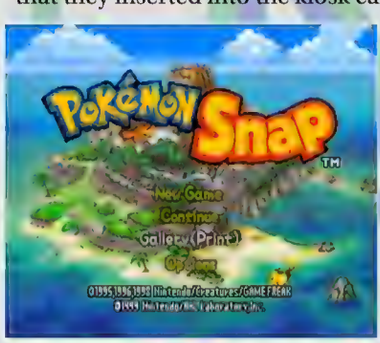
Not For Resale Cartridges

Mario Tennis
Developer: Camelot Software Planning
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Perfect Dark
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Rareware
Differences: None

Pokémon Snap (DEMO ONLY)
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: See below

This *Pokémon Snap* Not For Resale cartridge is a two-level demo that was used in the Pokémon Snap Station sticker-printing kiosk units found at Blockbuster Video stores. The kiosks allowed customers to print a sticker sheet of photos captured during play in the kiosk demo, or they could print stickers from saved photos on their own *Pokémon Snap* or *Pokémon Stadium* cartridges that they inserted into the kiosk cartridge slot.



Pokémon Snap
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Ninte
Differences: None

Pokémon Stadium
Developer: HAL Laboratory, Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: See below

The NFR cartridge is the 1.1 version of *Pokémon Stadium*.

Pokémon Stadium 2
Developer: HAL Laboratory, Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Star Fox 64
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences : None

Star Wars Episode I: Racer
Developer: LucasArts Entertainment
Publisher: LucasArts Entertainment
Differences: None

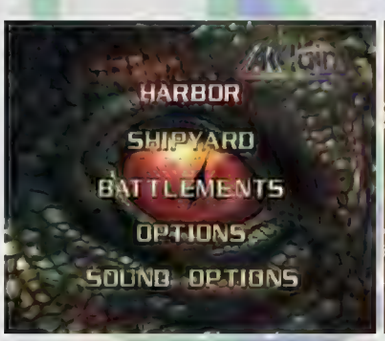
Not For Resale Cartridges

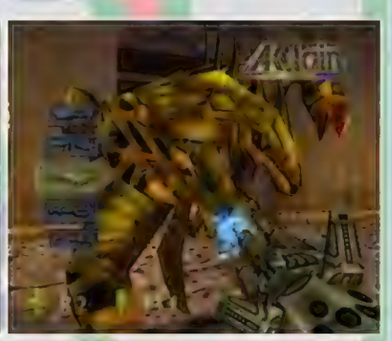
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron
Dev.: Factor 5, LucasArts Entertainment
Pub.: LucasArts Entertainment
Differences: None

Super Mario 64
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: None

Turok 2: Seeds Of Evil (NA)
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Differences: See below

This demo version of the game contains beta content and a few selectable stages to play (Harbor, Shipyard, Battlements). Players start with 15 different weapons available and ready for action.





Turok 2: Seeds Of Evil (EU)
Developer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
Differences: See below

This *Turok 2* NFR variant is identical to the NA-region cart but is the European-release (PAL) version, noted on the cart label's region code. Note: This is the only Not For Resale cartridge in PAL format known to exist.

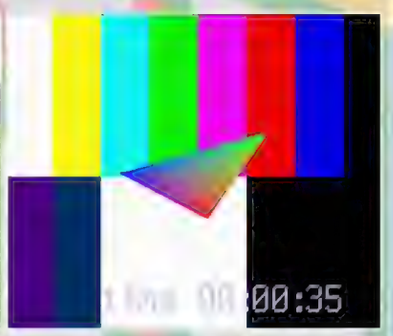
Yoshi's Story
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Differences: See below

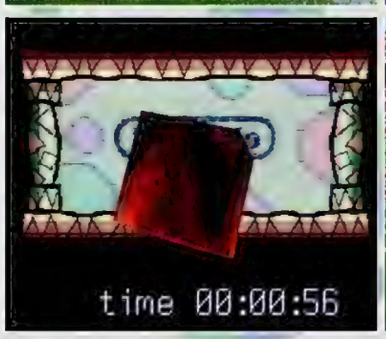
The *Yoshi's Story* NFR cartridge is, in fact, the Japanese version of the game. The front of the cartridge is the same but with a different label placed on top of the Japanese one that notes that it is the "INTERNATIONAL VERSION." The back Japanese cartridge plate is replaced by a North American version to fit in that region's console.

Aging Cartridge

Genre: Utility
Release Date: 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Features: None

The aging cartridge for the Nintendo 64 functions as a rudimentary stress test for the console hardware. The program cycles through four foreground graphics in 15-second intervals: a highly-stylized chrome U64 wordmark logo (representing the console's original "Ultra 64" name), a 2D triangle with a brick texture, a 2D triangle with an RGB gradient applied, and a spinning cube with a red-black texture. The backgrounds cycle through three images: the Nintendo logo for *Yoshi's Island* on the Super NES, a low-resolution photo of Ohio State University's football field, and traditional color bars. A cheerful sequenced tune loop plays roughly every minute, and a timer at the bottom-right indicates how long the program has been running in hours, minutes, and seconds. – DG

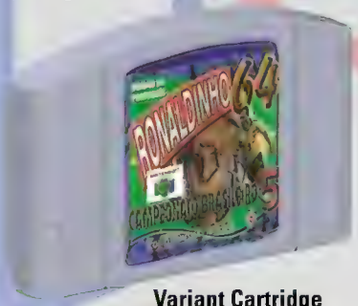




Mundial Ronaldinho Soccer 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: 1998
Region: South America
Developer: Konami Computer Entertainment Osaka
Ported by: Twin Eagles Group Peru (as Lai Pen Computer Group)
Pub.: Twin Eagles Group Peru
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save

Hahahaha! A boisterous laugh kicks off this modified version of *International Superstar Soccer 64*. Developed by Lobsang "Mr. Byte" Alvites and his team Twin Eagles Group under the alias Lai Pen Computer Group, this Peruvian outfit was best known for releasing SNES and PlayStation hacks for South American audiences during the 1990s. This title (translated as "World Little Ronald Soccer 64") was their lone N64 effort and the only known unlicensed/pirated Nintendo 64 game released during the console's life. This unlicensed cartridge does not contain a CIC protection chip, therefore requiring a passthrough device for it to function on an N64 console. There are some impressive changes in the presentation from its *ISS64* origin; the in-game voiceover work, though noticeably scratchy and compressed, is enthusiastically delivered in Portuñol, a pidgin of Portuguese and Spanish, which adds to the broadcast feel during gameplay. The anonymized player names have been converted to real player names from the time, a welcome addition. References to Konami and Nintendo (the companies behind *ISS64*) have been (mostly) scrubbed. However, the credits still provide the names of all the original Konami staff. The cover art and intro screen features the likeness of Ronaldo Nazario, a popular striker who was highly successful with the Brazilian national team and renowned for his rare combination of technical skill and raw speed. A variety of these bootleg cartridges were produced with various labels. For more information and a review of the original title, please see the *International Superstar Soccer 64* entry. – DG



Variant Cartridge

Variant Cartridge

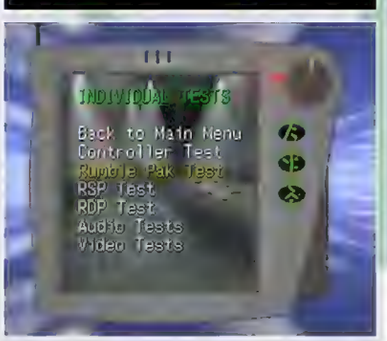
Variant Cartridge

Nintendo 64 Test Cartridge

Genre: Utility
Release Date: 1997
Region: NA
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Features: Rumble Pak

Test Cartridge with LED lit due to test failure.

The test cartridge for the Nintendo 64 provides a diagnostic suite of tools to check the N64 system's hardware, accessories, and controllers. It was available for Nintendo service centers and technicians. After an initial screen test, the splash screen shows a rotating N64 logo. From here, the user can select to automatically cycle through tests that require no user input, run individual tests, or perform a burn-in test that will loop through the automated tests. Individual tests include a Controller Test that will let the user confirm a plugged-in controller's buttons and analog ranges work by testing each in sequence; a Rumble Pak Test that allows the user to turn on and off a plugged-in Rumble Pak to confirm it works; an RSP test that validates the functionality of the Reality Signal Processor; an RDP test that cycles through diagnostics for the Reality Display Processor; audio tests that play sounds in the left, right, and stereo channels at different frequencies; and video tests that include toggling interlaced display, showing red, green, blue, and color bar screens, and a series of different Video Patterns that employ essential functions and filters. A red LED built into the front of the cartridge shell will flash in the event a test fails. Along the top of the cartridge, a JTAG ribbon cable port allows the cart to be flashed with newer revisions of the test software if needed. There are two known versions of the test cartridge: Rev. A and Rev. B. – DG



Nintendo 64 Hardware and Accessories

This section covers the most significant N64 hardware items, focusing on first-party and popular third-party accessories with unique features or designs. Many more third-party hardware accessories were made, including numerous clones of the Rumble Pak, Controller Pak equivalents with expanded memory, Nintendo 64 controller clones, video-out cables of different varieties, extension cables for controllers, cleaning kits, region cartridge converters, and more. Joshua Combs, Daniel Greenberg, and Pat Contri made contributions to the hardware and controller sections of this book.

For an even more exhaustive list of Nintendo 64 hardware and accessories, please visit the website Hardware.UltimateN64.com.

Joshua Combs is in the technology field, working as an application specialist. He has fond memories of the first time he saw Mario in 3D on the N64. He enjoys modern and retro gaming, especially on obscure/vintage hardware, Lagavulin 16, chess, hiking, and playing Dr Mario with his wife.

Nintendo 64 Control Deck

Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Manufacturer: Nintendo

Originally titled the Ultra 64 and codenamed Project Reality, the Nintendo 64 (commonly referred to as the N64) was Nintendo's entry into the 3D video gaming space. The iconic 3D polygonal magic the system is known for is thanks to the Reality Coprocessor, or RCP, which boasts 16.8 million colors and displays resolutions up to 640x480. Nintendo decided to retain the speed and reliability of cartridges over the mounting popularity and larger storage potential of compact discs. Unlike previous Nintendo consoles, a single system name and design was used across all regions. The default control deck shell was made with dark gray colored plastic with light gray accents, though numerous color variants and a handful of different form factors were produced during its lifespan. The system was packaged initially with one light gray controller, video cables, a power adapter, and documentation. Four controller ports made this the first Nintendo console with built-in four-player support without requiring a peripheral. The N64 was first launched in Japan on June 23, 1996, with three release titles: *Super Mario 64*, *Pilotwings 64*, and *Saikyō Habu Shogi*. North America's launch was on Sept. 29, 1996, with two games, *Super Mario 64* and *Pilotwings 64*. PAL regions had to wait until Mar. 1, 1997, for the console launch but had a more extensive lineup, with *Super Mario 64*, *FIFA 64*, *Pilotwings 64*, *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey*, and *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire*.

Jumper Pak

Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Manufacturer: Nintendo

The Jumper Pak came pre-installed in each Nintendo 64 console. It is a simple RAMBUS terminator (completing the circuit in an RDRAM array). It is included in the Nintendo 64 console, located under the Memory Expansion door. Two years later, the Expansion Pak was released to upgrade the console's usable memory. Jumper Paks were not sold separately.

Nintendo 64 Controller

Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Manufacturer: Nintendo

Like the console, the N64 controller is the same across all regions. The design features three arms in an "M" shape. This form factor gives a unique look to the controller and allows for multiple play styles for different games. The controller sports a dark gray D-pad, light gray analog Control Stick, red-colored START button, green B button, blue A button, yellow directional C-buttons with arrows molded into each, dark gray L and R shoulder buttons, and a dark gray trigger-style Z button on the underside of the center arm. The player can hold the two outermost arms for a more traditional controller experience, with the D-pad on the left and primary buttons on the right, with access to both shoulder buttons. Alternatively, one hand can shift to the center arm, which houses the octagonally-gated Control Stick and Z button on the back. This exchange means one shoulder button, and either the D-pad or face buttons are not comfortably available when the center arm is in use. The controller has a peripheral expansion slot built into the back shell, allowing for the Controller Pak, Rumble Pak, Transfer Pak, or other accessories to be inserted to add functionality or expand the controller's capabilities.

Controller Pak

Release Date: Nov. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Manufacturer: Nintendo

The Controller Pak (also called the Memory Pak) is the original method for saving N64 game data without on-cartridge storage and migrating saves for use elsewhere. It contains 32KB of flash storage and plugs into the N64 controller's expansion slot. This portability comes in handy when borrowing games from friends (or, in the past, renting them) because the same cartridge is not needed to continue playing a save. The downside to this method is that the Controller Pak cannot be used simultaneously with other controller accessories, such as the Rumble Pak or the Transfer Pak. Over time, more third-party games started incorporating built-in cartridge battery saves, lessening the need for the Controller Pak.

Rumble Pak
Release Date: July 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Manufacturer: Nintendo

The Rumble Pak is a plug-in feedback accessory that connects to the peripheral slot on the back of the N64 controller. It launched in 1997 and was bundled with *Star Fox 64* (later sold separately). It requires two AAA batteries. The accessory was praised as a way to feel games and build immersion, as specific actions or sequences took advantage of the force-feedback vibrations. Most of the N64's game library utilizes "rumble" functionality. The tactile appeal of the Rumble Pak became a mainstay of console game controllers in the video game generations that followed.

Expansion Pak
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Manufacturer: Nintendo

The Expansion Pak plugs into the top of the Nintendo 64 under a little cover near the front labeled "Memory Expansion." This small Pak is easily recognizable by its bright red plastic top and expands the console's RAM from 4MB to 8MB. Not many titles took advantage of the additional memory; some games required the Expansion Pak to run, while others performed noticeably better when used. The Nintendo Ejector Tool (NUS-012) was included with the Expansion Pak to make the removal of the Jumper Pak easier. A handful of games, such as *Re-Volt* and *Star Wars Episode 1: Racer*, used the extra RAM to enable higher resolutions. Other titles, like *San Francisco Rush 2049* and *StarCraft 64*, require it to access certain game features. The Expansion Pak was sold separately in all regions, but the NA and PAL regions also offered it with *Donkey Kong 64* and the DK64 Jungle Green system bundle. In Japan, *Donkey Kong 64*, *Perfect Dark*, and *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* each included the Expansion Pak as part of a bundle (these three were the only non-64DD titles that required the Expansion Pak to fully function).

Transfer Pak
Release Date: Mar. 2000 (NA, PAL), July 1998 (JP)
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Manufacturer: Nintendo

Included with *Pokémon Stadium* and sold separately, the Transfer Pak was released as Pokémon fever took the world by storm. The device allows communication between Game Boy titles and a Nintendo 64 cartridge by inserting a compatible Game Boy or Game Boy Color game into the Transfer Pak. For example, this allows access to captured Pokémon in a saved file of *Pokémon Red*, *Blue*, or *Yellow* for viewing or use in battle in *Pokémon Stadium* and *Pokémon Stadium 2*. There is Transfer Pak support for around 20 N64 and 64DD games, allowing a variety of results, such as transferring characters from Game Boy Color versions of *Mario Tennis* and *Mario Golf* to the N64 game or unlocking weapons in *Perfect Dark*.

Voice Recognition Unit (VRU) and Microphone
Region: JP, NA
Release Date: Nov. 2000 (NA), Dec. 1998 (JP)
Manufacturer: Nintendo

The VRU is required to give commands to Pikachu (*Hey You, Pikachu!*) and is optional to make announcements to train passengers (*Densha de Go! 64*). The VRU (VRS in Japan) was only available in bundles in North America and Japan, packed in with all copies of *Hey You, Pikachu!* and special big-box versions of *Densha de Go! 64*. The bundles included the game cartridge, VRU, microphone with a yellow foam windscreen, and a microphone holder (for North America, a mounting strap for the controller, and in Japan, a hands-free neck strap). The VRU plugs into the N64 console Socket 4 controller port. The microphone plugs into the VRU's 3.5mm audio input port; technically, any microphone with a 3.5mm connector would work. The VRU is region-locked per language (English and Japanese), so both titles will only function properly with its region's VRU/VRS.

HORI Pad Mini 64
Release Date: Q3 1999
Region: JP
Manufacturer: HORI

The HORI Pad Mini 64 was the result of a partnership between HORI and Nintendo. The controller features a unique form factor. Instead of the "M" shape of the standard N64 controller, this features only two arms, with the buttons condensed to a smaller area on the front. The Z-trigger is also moved, and there are now two, one below each of the L and R buttons. The Start button is smaller, a smaller D-pad is centered, and the Control Stick is a thumb pad on the left-hand side. The HORI Pad Mini was released in a range of colors, mimicking nearly all the available N64 controller solid colors: red, green, blue, yellow, black, and gold. There are also two variants with translucent fronts and white backs (Ocean Blue, Tropical Red) and two with translucent color on both sides (Snow White, Sweet Purple). A prototype translucent orange also exists.

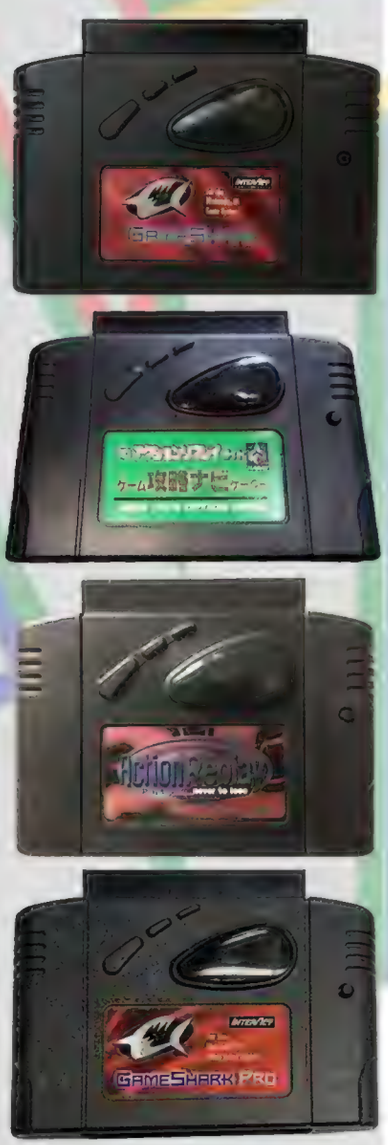
Memory Card
Memory Card Plus
Mega Memory Card

Release Date: Mar. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Manufacturer: InterAct

These popular third-party game memory packs, produced in several form factors over the years, provide 123, 492, or 3,936 pages of memory. The Performance-branded "red label" models are among the more recognizable non-Nintendo solutions for saving game data. The Memory Card Plus uses a physical switch on the back of the Pak to toggle between the four memory allocations. The largest of the three, the Mega Memory Card (rebranded as Massive Memory Card for the Performance line), swapped the physical switch on the back for an LCD and navigation buttons on the front to select from the 32 allocations.

GameShark (NA)
Pro Action Replay (JP)
Action Replay 64 (EU)

Release Date: Aug. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Manufacturer.: InterAct (NA), Karat (JP), Datel (PAL)



The GameShark for the N64 (Action Replay 64 in Europe and Pro Action Replay in Japan) is a cheat device similar to the Game Genie from the NES/SNES era. It inserts between the console and game into the cartridge slot, allowing cheat codes to be entered to alter gameplay by directly manipulating memory. The peripheral also bypasses the console's region-lock protections. Unlike the Game Genie, the GameShark stores these codes in its memory for future use. The GameShark comes preloaded with numerous cheat codes, and others have been discovered over time. Later "Pro" versions of the peripheral released in 1999 include a more comprehensive menu and the SharkLink parallel port on the back of the unit, allowing a PC connection for more direct memory manipulation. Scaled-back models were also released in 1999 (Equalizer in PAL regions and the matte-finished GameShark 3.30 in NA), featuring updated codes but no parallel port.

UltraRacer 64

Release Date: Mar. 1998
Region: NA, PAL
Manufacturer: InterAct

The UltraRacer 64 features a unique soft-grip dial as a rotatable analog steering mechanism. The C-buttons are positioned atop the dial, while a throttle control trigger and additional buttons rest on the face and side of the paddle-like controller. A toggle on the right side of the controller enables or disables the combination A and B "throttle control trigger." It is also programmable, allowing remapping that can help make certain games easier to play. The controller can work with various genres, but its design fits best with racing and driving games.

V3 Racing Wheel

Release Date: Sept. 1998 (NA), Dec. 1997 (PAL)
Region: NA, PAL
Manufacturer: InterAct

One of the more popular N64 steering wheel controllers, the V3 Racing Wheel includes a stylish steering column with all the necessary buttons and a separate unit with two foot pedals to transport players into their favorite racing games. It features an adjustable wheel height/tilt with auto-centering analog control. For stability, the wheel could either be attached to a flat surface, or the player could tuck the wide fins of the base under their legs and use the steering wheel in their lap. The unit also allows the wheel's sensitivity to be adjusted to encourage the player to dial in settings for their favorite games.

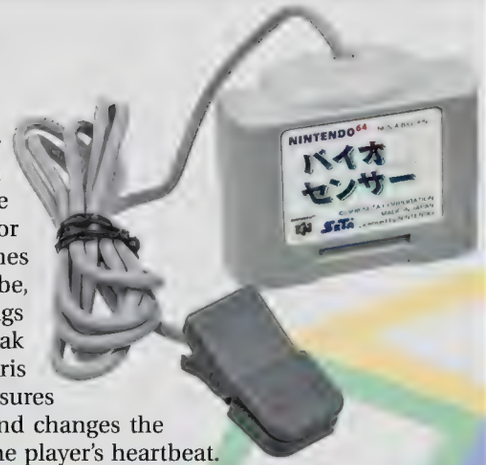
The Glove

Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: NA
Manufacturer: Reality Quest

The Glove is a wearable peripheral marketed as "the best way to control gameplay and another step towards VR gaming." The Glove has an ergonomic design, with all the standard buttons and controls of the Nintendo 64 controller rearranged to fit comfortably in the right hand while it is strapped to the right forearm. Only needing the right hand and not needing to hold it makes The Glove a good accessibility option. The analog controls activate by tilting the wrist left/right and up/down. The thumb controls the D-pad, and the buttons are reachable under the hand. The Glove has a Pak slot for using a Rumble Pak, Controller Pak, or other accessories. The Glove also offers an auto-centering feature, different button configurations, and toggle switches to reverse the X-axis and Y-axis orientations.

Third-Party Nintendo 64 Hardware and Accessories

Bio Sensor
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP
Manufacturer: SETA

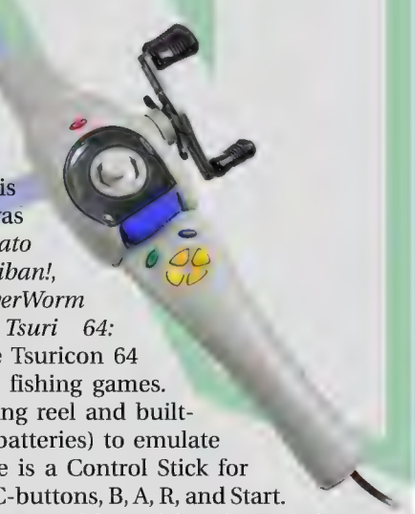


This bio-feedback sensor was released for use with the Japanese-exclusive *Tetris 64*. The Bio Sensor has a clip that attaches to the player's earlobe, and the other end plugs into the controller's Pak slot. While in Bio Tetris mode, the sensor measures the player's heart rate and changes the game pieces based on the player's heartbeat. In the default setting, if the heart rate is lower, simpler pieces are provided from Group A. If the player's heart rate is higher, more game pieces are provided from Group B, which includes more complex and peskier pieces.

Densha de Go! 64 Controller
Release Date: July 1999
Region: JP
Manufacturer: Taito

The *Densha de Go!* 64 Controller is an arcade-like peripheral that attempts to recreate the experience of controlling a train from the comfort of home. It is designed for and compatible with the Japanese-exclusive train simulator *Densha de Go! 64*. The controller was sold exclusively in Japan and separately from the game cartridge. It features a vertical control stick shift on the left to adjust speed and a horizontal handle on the right to apply brakes. The Start, Select, A, B, and C buttons are on the base. There is also a Select button, which is not from the N64 controller but is left over from the PlayStation model of this controller. There is also a recessed area for a pocket watch to help the player stay on time.

Tsuricon 64
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP
Manufacturer: ASCII



Released only in Japan, this fishing rod and reel peripheral was designed for use with *Itoi Shigesato no Bass Tsuri No. 1 Ketteiban!*, *Bass Rush: ECOGEAR PowerWorm Championship*, and *Nushi Tsuri 64: Shiokaze Ninotte*. However, the Tsuricon 64 is also compatible with earlier fishing games. The controller includes a turning reel and built-in rumble feature (via two AA batteries) to emulate the feel of actual fishing. There is a Control Stick for movement and rod-positioned C-buttons, B, A, R, and Start. The Z button is located on the bottom of the reel, but the D-pad and L button are not included. Packed in the box is a wrist strap to attach to the bottom to keep the rod from falling into the virtual water.

Dance Dance Revolution Controller
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: JP
Manufacturer: Konami

The Dance Dance Revolution Controller is an optional playmat controller for *Dance Dance Revolution Disney Dancing Museum* that was sold separately from that Japanese-exclusive rhythm game. The mat controller allows the player to dance along to various songs by tapping their feet. It has the normal directional controls, B, A, and Start buttons on the mat, alongside the Disney characters Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, and Chip and Dale printed on its surface.

iQue Player
Release Date: Nov. 2003
Region: China
Manufacturer: Nintendo, iQue

The iQue Player was a handheld Nintendo 64 console for the Chinese market. It features bolstered specs over the N64 console with an R-4300i 64-bit CPU and 16MB DDR RAM, of which eight are usable. The power cable and composite video outputs for a television are all connected through a specialized cable. The large, rounded controller is reminiscent of the original Xbox "Duke" controller. The iQue offers all the standard N64 controller buttons plus a power button for the system. It includes four demo games and can be loaded with more. The D-pad is softer, with concave notches for each cardinal direction. The Z button is on the left shoulder by the L button instead of a trigger style. A specialized 64MB memory card slotted into the system holds the games, which players downloaded in participating stores at an iQue kiosk. Starting in Oct. 2004, with the iQue@Home Windows application and a USB cable, users could purchase additional games, update the iQue Player, try game demos, and earn and use points to redeem for rewards. The games are ports of N64 titles, although translated to Mandarin, and some received bug fixes and patches. Although the console does not support the Rumble Pak, Controller Pak, or other accessories, it is a unique mini version of the system, supported well beyond the N64's lifespan. The last game, *Dōbutsu no Mori* (*Animal Forest*), was released in 2006, and the iQue Player was finally discontinued in 2016.

iQue Player Games:

2003: *Wave Race 64, Star Fox 64, Dr. Mario 64, Super Mario 64, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, Mario Kart 64*
2004: *F-Zero X, Yoshi's Story, Paper Mario, Sin and Punishment: Successor of Earth*
2005: *Excitebike 64, Super Smash Bros.*
2006: *Custom Robo, Animal Forest*

Charcoal Gray
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The standard released bundle of the Nintendo 64 system included a light gray controller, dark "charcoal" gray console deck, composite A/V cable, power supply, instructions, and a few Nintendo ads. Its Japanese release was in June 1996 and March 1998 in PAL territories. This console version saw the most bundle variations throughout the N64's lifespan, including ones with different controller color variants like Atomic Purple, Extreme Green, and Gold. Pack-in games, such as *Star Wars Episode 1: Racer* and *GoldenEye 007*, were also offered in different bundles.

Hyundai Comboy 64
Release Date: June 1997
Region: South Korea

The Hyundai Comboy console variant was released exclusively in the South Korean market and is largely similar to the standard console. The most distinctive difference is the light gray printing of the Power, On-Off, and Reset text in Korean, alongside the English-language equivalent. In addition, the Hyundai Comboy 64 logo is printed in the same light gray color on the Memory Expansion cover. The bundle includes a similarly marked light gray controller.

All Nippon Airlines
Release Date: Feb. 1999
Region: JP

Flying on the Pokémon Jet Part 2 planes from All Nippon Airlines ("ANA") in the late 1990s earned some air travelers this console variation. In 1998, ANA debuted its first three Pokémon-painted Boeing aircraft. Four more were added to the fleet in 1999. To celebrate this second wave, from February 1st to April 30th of 1999, ANA partnered with Nintendo on a campaign to award a few lucky passengers of the colorful jets a custom Nintendo 64 bundle. The standard gray console included in the prize sports a custom-printed Memory Expansion cover featuring the blue and white ANA logo. The bundle came in a matching blue and white shipping box branded with Nintendo 64 ANA and Pokémon Jet Part 2. Two games, *Hey You, Pikachu!*, and *Pokémon Stadium*, were included with the console, along with a standard light gray controller. The prize bundles were only available and released in Japan on participating domestic and international ANA flights.

Lawson Official Ticket Station J.League
Release Date: Q2 1999
Region: JP

This console was available through Lawson convenience stores in Japan but only via a lottery system, allowing winners to purchase the console. While the console itself resembles a standard charcoal gray unit, it includes a sticker displaying the J.League logo and stating Ticket Station Lawson on the Expansion Pak cover. A standard light gray controller with a matching sticker was included with the system.

Funtastic Smoke Black Clear Black (JP)
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

In 2000 (1999 in Japan), Nintendo released a lineup of consoles and controllers with frosted translucent colored shells. Available worldwide, the series featured six color variations: Black, Green, Orange, Blue, Red, and Purple. The Smoke Black (or Clear Black in Japan) console was released in all regions. The console has a smokey tint to the translucent plastic, as does the matching controller bundled with it.

Funtastic Jungle Green
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The Funtastic Jungle Green console was released in a couple of different bundles. This translucent green console with a matching controller was sold as a basic set, but there was also the special Donkey Kong Set that included *Donkey Kong 64* and the required Expansion Pak. A unique version of this same bundle, packaged in a large wooden crate, was released in Australia as a promotion by *Nintendo Magazine System*, the official Nintendo magazine of the region.

Funtastic Fire Orange Sun Orange (PAL)
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The Fire Orange N64 set featured a bright, translucent orange N64 console and a matching controller. While it was available globally with no variance in the bundle contents, the PAL region name is Sun Orange.

Funtastic Ice Blue
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

This chilly Ice Blue console features a semi-transparent frosted blue system bundled with a controller of the same shade. Unlike Funtastic Fire Orange, all three major regions chose the same name for this lighter blue-hued variant.

Funtastic Watermelon Red Fire Red (PAL)
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

This console, available bundled with a matching controller, is represented by a frosted, deep red color that calls to mind the sweet summer fruit. Europe went a different direction with the branding, as the PAL release is known as Fire Red.

Funtastic Grape Purple Midnight Blue (JP)
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The Funtastic Grape Purple console and controller were released worldwide. The console's dark indigo hue looks almost blue, possibly contributing to Japan's different "Midnight Blue" name.

Funtastic Clear Blue
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP, PAL

This two-tone combo provided a fun variation on the Funtastic Series. The Clear Blue console and controller feature a white translucent bottom with an Ice Blue top shell.

Funtastic Clear Red
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP

Like the Clear Blue, the Clear Red system set included a dual-colored system and controller consisting of a white and Watermelon/Fire Red semi-clear plastic combination.

JUSCO 30th Anniversary
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP

The JUSCO console was released to celebrate the 30th anniversary of JUSCO (Japanese United Stores Company) and was built with a unique clear black top and translucent white bottom combination. The console comes bundled with a matching controller. Unsurprisingly, the system and controller were only available in Japan for purchase at JUSCO stores.

Daiei Hawks
Release Date: Q1 2000
Region: JP

This console was released exclusively in Japan for sale only at the Daiei department store. As the company at the time owned the Fukuoka Daiei Hawks baseball team, this console affectionately became known as the Daiei Hawks N64. The system and bundled controller sport the orange and black colors of the franchise and its sponsor, with the console top being translucent Fire Orange and the bottom black.

Pokémon Stadium Battle Set (UK)
Pokémon PokéManiac N64 (AUS)
Release Date: Apr. 2000 (UK), Nov. 1999 (AUS)
Region: UK, AUS

The Pokémon Stadium Battle Set in NA included a standard N64 console, *Pokémon Stadium* cartridge, an Atomic Purple controller, a standard controller, a Transfer Pak to migrate Pokémon from the *Pokémon Red*, *Blue*, or *Yellow* Game Boy games to battle it out on the N64, and the official *Pokémon Stadium* player's guide. However, PAL regions featured this blue and yellow console with the "Pokémon" logo and Pokémon from the Kanto region printed along the top sides of the console. The included dual-color controller inverses the console colors, with yellow on the top and blue on the bottom, complete with the "Pokémon" wordmark on the front. The Australian bundle named this console set the "Special Limited Edition Pokémon PokéManiac N64" on the box. It was released in late 1999, so the Pokémon PokéManiac N64 set did not include *Pokémon Stadium* or the Transfer Pak. However, it did have a promotional VHS cassette titled *Pokémon: I Choose You! Pikachu!*, containing the first few episodes of the *Pokémon* TV show and the "Pokérap" music video.

Pokémon Pikachu (Light Blue)
Release Date: July 2000
Region: JP

A Japanese exclusive, this Pikachu console is similar to the edition released in North America and Europe. The primary distinction is the light blue and yellow color combination. The image on the matching controller reads "Pikachu," like the front badge of the system, with some added lighting bolts and Pika's tail in the logo.

Pokémon Pikachu (Orange)
Release Date: July 2000
Region: JP

This special orange and yellow Pikachu console variation has a light orange top paired with the standard yellow color for the bottom. Otherwise, it is identical to the Light Blue Pikachu console. Its bundle included a matching controller with the same Pikachu logo.

Pokémon Pikachu (Blue)
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL

The Pikachu Nintendo 64 Set included this console with a molded Pikachu on its top, with cheeks that light up red when powered on, just like everyone's favorite Pocket Monster. The reset button is Pikachu's foot, with a speech bubble showcasing Ash informing players to "PRESS HERE TO RESET" and a Pokéball for a power switch. This two-tone console sports a dark blue top and yellow bottom, with yellow accenting the cartridge slot. The matching dual-color controller reads "Pokémon" across the front, just like the front badge of the console. This console set was released across European stores but was exclusive to Toys "R" Us in North America. The NA bundle also included *Hey You, Pikachu!* with the Voice Recognition Unit, microphone, and a bonus Animated Pokémon Talking Watch.

Limited Edition Gold

Release Date: Nov. 2000 (NA), Q4 1998 (JP)
Region: JP, NA

The Limited Edition Gold console bundle included a brilliant gold-colored Nintendo 64. The North American set included two golden N64 controllers. In Japan, the console set included only one controller (its release was to coincide with/celebrate the new *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. This two-controller set was exclusive to Toys "R" Us stores in North America and Europe. It has not been confirmed if this was also a Toys "R" Us exclusive in Japan, but they were the primary outlet for this special edition console.

FoxData Chrome

Release Date: June 1997
Region: UK

FoxData, located in the United Kingdom, offered unofficial customized Nintendo 64 consoles and controllers. This first series offered to convert a standard charcoal gray N64 to a custom metallic chrome finish and would also overlay official Nintendo 64 controllers in one of four chromed colors. It is unknown how many people took advantage of this option, but a few examples exist.

FoxData Electric Blue

Release Date: Unreleased
Region: UK

This one-off console variant was produced by FoxData's owner and is the same color as the FoxData Electric Blue controller.

FoxData Mahogany

Release Date: Unreleased
Region: UK

This prototype console variant consists of a faux-wood mahogany finish that more closely matches FoxData's Print series line of controllers. However, it was created as a one-off by FoxData using the same process as was used for the FoxData Print Series controllers and was never publicly available for sale.

Nintendo 64 Controllers

Gray
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The standard gray Nintendo 64 controller launched in a bundle with the dark gray "charcoal" console. It was first available in July 1996 in Japan, followed by North America in September and PAL regions in March 1997.

Red
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL

This red-colored variant of the standard controller launched the same day as the console but was sold separately. The plastic of this red controller body is similar to the color of the Start button.

Green
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The green-colored variant on the standard controller was also available on launch day in a standalone box. The shade of green used for the plastic shell closely matches the green color of the B button on the controller.

Blue
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The blue version of the launch-day controller color options could be purchased separately. The front and back are molded in blue plastic that closely matches the blue color of the A button on the controller.

Yellow
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL

Like the blue, the yellow controller was sold separately at launch. It is molded entirely in yellow plastic. Its bright lemon-yellow color closely matches the C-buttons.

Black
Release Date: Sept. 1996
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The black launch-day color is interesting in that it matches more the dark gray "charcoal" color of the N64 console versus being pure black. Nonetheless, it was never officially sold as part of a console bundle and had to be purchased separately.

Mario Kart 64 Edition
Release Date: Dec. 1996
Region: JP

This Japanese exclusive was sold individually and bundled with a big-box version of *Mario Kart 64*. The front side is black, while the back is the standard light gray color – reflective of the colors of those two separate controllers.

Hello Mac
Release Date: Q1 1997
Region: JP

The "Hello Mac" controller was bundled with the purchase of an N64 console from Hello Mac stores in Japan. The controller is a combination of black and standard light gray colors. In keeping with its nickname, the store's mascot, the Hello Mac Lion, is printed onto the controller above the Start button.

Geoffrey
Release Date: Q1 1997
Region: JP

The "Geoffrey" controller was sold promotionally at Japanese Toys "R" Us stores with the purchase of an N64 console. The front color is the same as the black controller, while the back is the standard light gray. In faithfulness to its moniker, this controller features the Toys "R" Us mascot, Geoffrey the Giraffe, below the Nintendo logo.

Nintendo Power Cup
Release Date: Q2 1997
Region: JP, NA

In the March 1997 issue of *Nintendo Power* (and store promo in Japan), players were challenged to send a photo showcasing their fastest Time Trial speeds in *Mario Kart 64*. Racers who broke the 1:30 record on Mario's Raceway could win one of 1,000 gold-toned controllers in a random drawing. These are identical to the later retail gold controllers, except these state "MADE IN JAPAN" near the controller's Pak slot instead of "MADE IN CHINA."

Nintendo 64 Controllers

Hyundai Comboy Gray
Release Date: June 1997
Region: South Korea

This light gray controller was available exclusively in South Korea as the Nintendo Comboy was initially sold there instead of the Nintendo 64. "Hyundai 64 Comboy" and "Start" are screenprinted in Korean under the Nintendo logo. It was sold separately but could also be purchased with the console.

Hyundai Comboy Red
Release Date: June 1997
Region: South Korea

This red version of the Hyundai Comboy controller was also exclusive to the South Korean market. It shares the same screenprinting and buttons as the gray model.

Golden N
Release Date: June 1997
Region: NA

This unique gold and black controller was a prize for the four-player *Star Fox 64* competition at Nintendo's booth at the 1997 E3 event in Atlanta, Georgia. A golden 3D-perspective "N" logo emblazes the front of the controller. The number of these that exist is unknown, but they were used exclusively as competition prizes or giveaways.

Gold
Release Date: Sept. 1997
Region: JP, NA, PAL

This gleaming controller is molded in gold-colored plastic. It was sold individually, in bundles with the standard console, and with a limited edition matching gold console. In North America, all iterations of the gold controller were sold exclusively at Toys "R" Us. In the UK, it was bundled in a special release with the standard console and (fittingly) *GoldenEye 007*.

Nintendo Power 100
Release Date: Q4 1997
Region: NA

This promotional controller was only available for a limited time through the *Super Power Supplies* catalog to celebrate 100 issues of *Nintendo Power*. Marketed as an "extremely limited" gold controller, it is similar to the retail release. However, it includes a small black and gold sticker badge denoting "Nintendo Power 100" above the Nintendo logo.

Limited Edition Extreme Green
Release Date: Sept. 1998
Region: NA

This "Extreme" controller has a translucent lime green-colored shell. It was released as a standalone controller exclusive to Toys "R" Us and was also available as a limited edition bundle with the standard N64 console.

Atomic Purple Clear Purple (PAL)
Release Date: Nov. 1998
Region: JP, NA, PAL

This "atomic" controller sports a light purple translucent shell. It was a standalone release and also in various bundles with a standard controller and console. In the NA and PAL markets, the Pokémon *Stadium* Battle Set included one Atomic Purple controller. In PAL/AUS regions, the Twin Controller Pack set included the standard console, a standard controller, and an Atomic Purple controller.

Lawson J.League Official Ticket Station
Release Date: Q2 1999
Region: JP

Released exclusively through the Japanese convenience store chain Lawson, this controller was bundled with a matching system and featured a sticker with the J.League and Lawson logos that denoted "Official Ticket Station." Patrons wishing to purchase the console bundle had to enter a lottery to win the chance to purchase it.

Donkey Kong 64 Banana Bunch
Release Date: Q4 1999
Region: NA

This yellow controller is branded with a red "DK64" logo, and the arm tips are painted dark to appear as bananas attached to a bunch. This limited-time promotional item was available as part of the "Jungle Pak" for customers starting or renewing a Nintendo Power subscription in late 1999-early 2000, along with the *Official Donkey Kong 64 Player's Guide* and 12 months of *Nintendo Power*.

Black and Gray
Release Date: Q1 2000
Region: JP

This two-toned controller is nearly identical to the earlier Mario Kart 64 Edition. The front is standard black, and light gray is on the underside. The box branding had no association with *Mario Kart 64*. The only true difference is that the controller is denoted as "MADE IN CHINA" near the Pak slot instead of in Japan.

Funtastic Smoke Black Clear Black (JP)
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

In 2000 (1999 in Japan), Nintendo released the "Funtastic" lineup of several controllers and consoles with frosted translucent colored shells. The Funtastic Smoke Black controller is a hazy, smokey-black color. This controller was sold separately and bundled with the same-colored console.

Funtastic Jungle Green
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

The Jungle Green controller is a translucent green. It was available alone and as part of the Funtastic Jungle Green console bundle. Unlike its Funtastic siblings, this controller was also offered in a unique bundle – the Donkey Kong 64 Set, which included a Jungle Green controller, Jungle Green console, Expansion Pak, and *Donkey Kong 64* Game Pak.

Funtastic Fire Orange Sun Orange (PAL)
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

This warm, fire-orange colored controller came bundled with a console of the same translucent color and was also sold separately. This controller and bundle were called Sun Orange instead of Fire Orange in PAL regions, so choose your heat level accordingly.

Funtastic Ice Blue
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

This icy, translucent blue controller has a bright aqua-colored tint and was sold both separately and bundled with a matching Ice Blue console of the same color.

Funtastic Watermelon Red Fire Red (PAL)
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

Featuring a bold red color known as Fire Red in PAL regions, this frosted translucent controller was available either as a standalone purchase or as a bundle with the matching console.

Funtastic Grape Purple Midnight Blue (JP)
Release Date: Mar. 2000
Region: JP, NA, PAL

This berry-hued controller is a notably darker shade of purple than Atomic Purple. It was released globally, but in Japan, it is known as Midnight Blue. Like other Funtastic controllers, it was sold individually and bundled with a matching Grape Purple/Midnight Blue console.

Funtastic Clear Blue
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP, PAL

This later Funtastic entry used the light Ice Blue color for the front of the shell but a semi-clear white color for the back. The controller was packaged with a matching console, with the bottom swapped out for the pale, frosted base. It was also available for sale individually.

Funtastic Clear Red
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP

Funtastic Clear Red is the other late Funtastic mash-up. It features the Watermelon (Fire) Red front color with a clear white back, matching the system bundled with it. Additional controllers could be purchased separately.

JUSCO 30th Anniversary
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP

This controller was released for the 30th Anniversary of the Japanese company JUSCO (Japan United Stores Company), a chain of general merchandise stores. It features a gray translucent front and a white translucent bottom. It was only available at JUSCO stores, either bundled with the JUSCO console or sold separately.

Daiei Hawks
Release Date: Q1 2000
Region: JP

This controller was for sale exclusively at the Japanese department store chain Daiei, which at the time owned the baseball team from Fukuoka, the Daiei Hawks. It uses a blend of the team's color scheme with a translucent orange top and solid black bottom. It was sold as a standalone controller and included with the Daiei Hawks N64 console.

Nintendo 64 Controllers

Millennium 2000
Release Date: Q2 2000
Region: NA

The Millenium 2000 controller is a unique color combination of silver and black. The buttons and D-pad are also distinctive because they are made of dark black plastic. "Millennium 2000" is printed in black on the front. This Nintendo Power giveaway was sent to 1,000 winners to celebrate the turn of the century. Subscribers could send in a 3" x 5" card by Feb. 15, 2000, to be entered for a chance to win.

Pokémon Stadium Battle Set (UK)
Pokémon PokéManiac N64 (AUS)
Release Date: Apr. 2000 (UK), Nov. 1999 (AUS)
Region: UK, AUS

This controller was released as part of the Pokémon Stadium Battle Set in the UK and the Pokémon PokéManiac N64 in Australia. Its color scheme is inverted from the blue-over-yellow Pikachu controller to yellow-over-blue. It features the familiar "Pokémon" logo on the front.

Pikachu Light Blue/Yellow
Release Date: July 2000
Region: JP

This Japanese-only version of the Pikachu Blue/Yellow controller was sold separately and bundled with a matching lighter-blue version of the Pikachu N64 console. The silkscreened "Pikachu Nintendo 64" has some unique flair, with the "h" in "Pikachu" styled after Pikachu's zig-zag lightning bolts and four small lightning bolts surrounding the logo.

Pikachu Orange/Yellow
Release Date: July 2000
Region: JP

Like the Pikachu Light Blue controller, the Pikachu Orange controller was sold separately and bundled with a matching orange and yellow Pikachu N64 console. It sports the same "Pikachu Nintendo 64" screen-printed logo and lightning bolts as the light blue variant.

Pikachu Blue/Yellow
Release Date: Nov. 2000
Region: NA, PAL

This controller was exclusively bundled with the special form factor of the N64 console in the Pikachu Nintendo 64 Set. The controller shares the same two-tone design of the blue top and yellow bottom as the console it was paired with, with a silkscreened "Pokémon" moniker above the Start button.

Foxdata Chrome Series
Release Date: June 1997
Region: UK

British company FoxData offered unofficial modifications to stock Nintendo 64 controllers and consoles. This first set of available controller customizations were shiny, mirror-like polishes that resulted in a unique, reflective look. The four colors available were Gold, Electric Blue, Metallic Copper, and Chrome. Customers could call to order one of these special controllers or send their own controller to undergo the special paint procedure. Unlike the four controller color options, consoles appear to have only been advertised in Chrome. As they are unofficial mods, these controllers were never released in stores, and it is unknown how many were created. Controllers were shipped to customers in their original release box with a sticker reading the new color and FoxData on it.

FoxData Print Series
Release Date: Late 1997
Region: UK

FoxData released a second lineup of custom-painted controllers for the holidays, with different printed patterns on unique matte colors. The Print Series consisted of Desert Storm, Chrome Leopard, Purple Forest, and Red Rain. Like the Chrome Series, these controllers are otherwise unmodified stock controllers painted with a unique pattern. There are believed to have been several hundred produced in this series, but this has yet to be confirmed.

64DD Hardware and Accessories

64DD

Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Manufacturer: Nintendo

The Nintendo 64 Disk Drive (64DD) add-on was announced in 1995 as a way to bring improved graphics, bigger games, and online connectivity to the upcoming N64 system. It connects to the expansion port on the bottom of the N64 and shares a design similar to the standard console, with a dark gray shell and light gray accents. The system features a unique diskette drive reminiscent of the Famicom Disk System, with magnetic floppy disks to store data, extra memory, and a battery backup for a real-time clock. Originally intended to bring a wave of new games to the Nintendo 64, the 64DD became a Japanese exclusive through a mail-order subscription in late 1999 known as the Randnet Starter Kit. The subscription service included the 64DD hardware, the required Expansion Pak, a modem cartridge, six exclusive 64DD games/software, and access to Randnet, an online service and platform. Check out the separate 64DD article for more information!

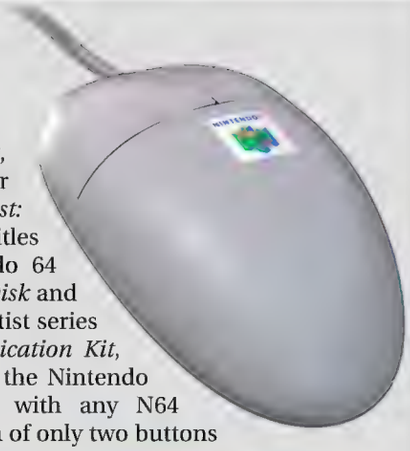
Modem Cartridge

Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Manufacturer: Nintendo

The Modem Cartridge was included with the Randnet Starter Kit. This special cartridge is inserted into the top of a Nintendo 64 like a typical cartridge. However, the back of the cartridge has a telephone input jack. Using the Nintendo 64 Modem in conjunction with a telephone cable could allow a user to connect to the Randnet online service. A green light on the front would light when the modem was in use. The Nintendo 64 Modem was included as part of the 64DD Randnet Starter Kit in late 1999. However, it would require the release of *Randnet Disk* in Feb. 2000 and the launching of Randnet to be functional.

Nintendo 64 Mouse

Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Manufacturer: Nintendo



This two-button, analog, mechanical mouse controller came bundled with *Mario Artist: Paint Studio*. Five 64DD titles officially support the Nintendo 64 Mouse: Randnet via *Randnet Disk* and the other three 64DD Mario Artist series titles: *Talent Studio*, *Communication Kit*, and *Polygon Studio*. However, the Nintendo 64 Mouse technically works with any N64 game, albeit with the limitation of only two buttons available.

Capture Cassette

Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: JP
Manufacturer: Nintendo

The Capture Cassette is a special cartridge bundled with the 64DD title *Mario Artist: Talent Studio* that houses composite audio/video ports and a 3.5mm microphone jack on its back. It allows players to record audio and export movies in *Talent Studio*, import and export images for *Mario Artist: Paint Studio*, add effects to recorded videos in *Mario Artist: Communication Kit*, and import/export textures and 3D models for use in *Mario Artist: Polygon Studio*.

Nintendo 64 Keyboard

Release Date: Apr. 2000
Region: JP
Manufacturer: RandnetDD

Produced from a pre-existing keyboard design (BTC-5510m) and HORI Joybus chip, the Nintendo 64 Keyboard is a standard QWERTY keyboard that 64DD owners could order through the now-defunct Randnet service. This optional accessory would have been helpful when using the Randnet online service/platform, where users could use the subscription service for web browsing, accessing online bulletin boards, email, and more. The keyboard plugs into the standard Nintendo 64 console controller port. The keyboard base is black, while the keys are white and dark blue. A sticker set for some of the N64 controller buttons is included to place on the keyboard keys for the A, B, C-left, C-right, and R buttons, with instructions for which keys to place the stickers onto.

F-Zero X Expansion Kit

Genre: Racing
Release Date: Apr. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Disk Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (required), *F-Zero X* (required)
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Medium
☆☆☆☆☆

Nintendo's trippy, futuristic racer gets a second lap in this *F-Zero X* "version 1.5" expansion developed for the 64DD. As before, players must rocket a slippery hovercraft across an assortment of 3D, mind-bending courses full of loops, corkscrews, and game-ending falls. The competition is the real challenge, with packs of vicious contestants always anxious to "slide-swipe" their opponents into oblivion. The original's 30 tracks and championship cups return from the required Japanese *F-Zero X* cartridge, as do the same 30 selectable vehicles, four-way multiplayer options, time trials, and battle-heavy Death Race mode. This update adds customization – players can now create their own courses with unprecedented freedom, weaving whatever outlandish design comes to mind. This benefit comes from the Course Edit screen, where points are laid and connected across a checkerboard grid, creating a series of interlocking track segments that can be altered independently. One section, for instance, might be raised into a steep, plummeting slope, the next bent into a deadly hairpin turn, and the third stretched into an exhilarating loop-de-loop. Players can also plot obstacles, terrain types, and shield-healing pitstops; editable premade courses are also available for newbies seeking extra guidance. Thankfully, players can test-run their twisted creations anytime and save up to 100 of their wildest designs. The Create Machine feature works similarly, allowing users to construct their craft by choosing from a pool of preexisting pieces and selecting the car's boost, body, and grip parameters. However, limitations are in place to prevent players from creating anything too overpowered. Fortunately, veteran fans just wanting to race have not been left out; 12 new tracks for this upgrade are featured, all catering to the expert player seeking a genuine, excruciating challenge. New stereophonic compositions (in addition to the retained monaural score) further complement the already screaming soundtrack, and the graphics, although untouched, remain as fast and furious as ever. Indeed, an already excellent racing experience has been made better.

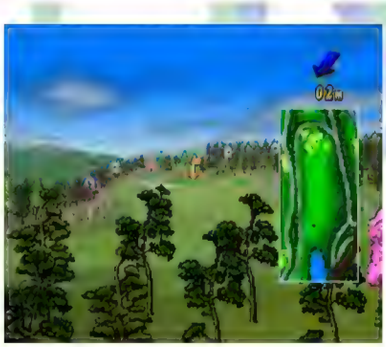
Reflections: More than *Mario Kart 64* or *Wave Race 64*, *F-Zero X* was perhaps the N64's most poignant ode to the driving genre, Nintendo's magnum opus to a type of racing game rarely seen anymore. This observation is why, being an F-Zero fan, I had a bittersweet time writing this review. Not only has Nintendo (seemingly) abandoned the franchise, but it buried the series' most feature-rich entry inside a now long-forgotten, abandoned machine. Perhaps one day, short of finally receiving a new F-Zero, Nintendo might rerelease this wonder via its online subscription service or, better yet, a Virtual Console. – DA

Case Artwork

Japan Pro Golf Tour 64

Genre: Sports
Release Date: May 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Media Factory, SETA
Publisher: Media Factory
Players: 1-4
Feat.: Disk Save, Modem Cartridge (optional), Expansion Pak (required)
Japanese Required: Low
Availability: Rare
☆☆☆

Hit the green and tee off against computer players or friends as one of four selectable avatars (complete with customization choices for shot distance and names) or Japan's greatest pros in this aesthetically pleasing but mechanically frustrating golfing sim. The player's time on the links takes place from a third-person perspective and features an easily controllable camera that allows them to scope out each hole and their golfer from a variety of angles. This intuitive camera is coupled with an excellent user interface, made up of well-designed icons and power meters that simultaneously show swing/putt power and impact force; these designs effectively visualize the practices of choosing equipment, aiming a shot, and swinging the club with a flick of the analog stick. Choose from six game modes: match games are single 18-hole rounds between two players, while stroke play and multi-course tournaments allow up to four. The single-player Grand Opening Tournament boasts competing against the Japanese pro golfers, the course-spanning Career Mode is for a created golfer, and there is a handicap-based Qualifying Tournament. Finally, Network Tournament allowed players to save their golf score and share it on Randnet by entering a game-supplied password on a web page. The 10 offered courses are visually appealing, with excellent uses of pastoral colors for the greens and water traps, majestic backdrops of expansive skies and mountains, and the occasional decoration of cherry blossom trees to give golfing rounds an unmistakably Japanese aesthetic. Unfortunately, the visual pleasantry of the interface and scenery is somewhat marred by the tediousness of the actual golfing mechanics. Despite the ease of the controls, the golfer's actions feel finicky, as turning the analog stick even slightly too far can result in confusingly wild swings. This control problem is exacerbated by the wind, which often seems to contradict the icon on the aiming interface. While these control and environmental factors do not necessarily feel out of place for a golf simulation (as the real sport can be a delicate endeavor), they tend to clash with the streamlined interface, resulting in frustratingly unpredictable scenarios. Despite the mechanical setbacks, the interface and calming visual style create a fun, if occasionally obtuse, golfing session.



Reflections: When I think of golf, both the real-life and video game varieties, my mental image of it is usually serene in scope. To that end, I believe that *Japan Pro Golf Tour 64* nailed the sport's aesthetic sensibilities through its soft colors, unobtrusive visual design, and buttery smooth soundtrack – it is very unfortunate then that the swinging and putting mechanics do not always function in tandem with these qualities. Equally unfortunate is that this game's online leaderboards, accessed via the 64DD modem cartridge, were taken down not long after its release, as I would have very much enjoyed the opportunity to show players around the world how effectively I hit sand traps. – CP

Case Artwork

Kyojin no Doshin 1

[Doshin the Giant 1]
Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Developer: Param
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Feat.: Disk Save, Expansion Pak (required)
Japanese Required: High
Availability: Uncommon
☆☆☆

Become an adored or reviled deity in this lovably strange, if sluggish, third-person god simulator. Control the sun god Doshin, a yellow Love Giant with lanky arms, stubby legs, and an awkwardly pronounced belly button. Doshin rises from the ocean each morning near an archipelago and spends his day (around 30 minutes) walking around the map at a snail's pace and making the lives of the islands' tiny residents, usually based in villages dotted across the larger islands, better or worse. These escapades will likely result in a monument to Doshin being built the following day – the ultimate goal is to have the villagers construct 16 monuments. Doshin can use his long arms to raise land and form mountains or jump with enough force to sink the surrounding earth and form plains or lakes. Doshin can also pick up and throw foliage, buildings, or villagers, creating luscious tropical paradises with ease. Performing these actions, usually requested by the villagers via speech bubbles, can result in them showering Doshin with their affection, represented by hearts that fill up a meter bordering the edges of the screen. Upon collecting 21 hearts, Doshin will grow taller, allowing for more effective uses of his terraforming powers for the remainder of the day (his size resets each morning). If love and niceties do not appeal, Doshin can transform into the Hate Giant Jashin with a simple press of the R button. This raging red god can level vast swathes of land and scatter foliage and buildings by jumping or using seismic powers, which take the place of Doshin's raising abilities. Jashin's actions result in hatred from the villagers, represented by skulls, which will cause him to grow larger if the 21-count quota is filled. The end of each day is marked by feedback from the villagers, providing hints for how to get enough love or hate for more monuments. Whether the player spends time creating utopias or annihilating everything, they will likely find the tasks fruitful and fun to fulfill, assuming they do not fall asleep while walking to them.

Reflections: If I had to choose one word for *Doshin the Giant 1*, it would be "quirky" – I use this word both as a compliment and a complaint. Doshin's actions and their effects on the world around him are very satisfying, and it is always fun to stop and reflect on the fact that you are enhancing or destroying an entire society using a creature that looks like a child's drawing. This wonder is, unfortunately, slightly offset by the game's meandering pace. Every major island in the archipelago has things to do, but the journey to get to those things is usually dull. It is easy to see that the developers were trying to holistically encapsulate the experience of being a giant. Still, maybe a god of brevity would have been the better choice for a protagonist. – CP

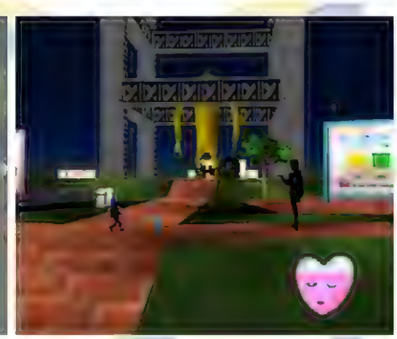
Case Artwork

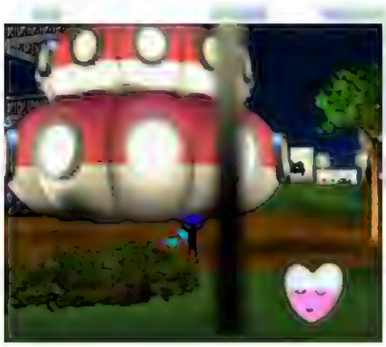
Kyojin no Doshin Kaihō Sensen Chibikko Chikko Daishūgō

[Doshin the Giant: Tinkling Toddler Liberation Front! Assemble!]
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: May 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Param
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Feat.: Disk Save, Expansion Pak (required), *Kyojin no Doshin 1* (required)
Japanese Required: High
Availability: Very Uncommon
☆

Rescue everyone's favorite Love Giant by emptying the bladder and watching videos in this tedious amalgamation of half-baked ideas that acts as an expansion to *Doshin the Giant 1*. This barebones adventure begins with a child going to sleep and dreaming that he takes the form of a shadow being who leaps out of his bedroom window to attend the 1996 Doshin Expo, where he discovers the gentle yellow giant is being held as a prisoner. Using an utterly monotonous rail-based movement system, the player can walk around the expo from a fixed-camera third-person perspective. The player must also urinate hearts by rapidly pressing the Z-trigger to ensure that a constantly filling meter on the lower right corner of the screen does not overflow, as this causes the dream to end due to a wet bed. Fortunately, the child can pee on a variety of objects, including Doshin, who will slowly grow after absorbing enough hearts. The nighttime festival is set up like a dartboard, with interconnected circular sidewalks leading to a steel tower holding the imprisoned Doshin at the bullseye. The walkways are littered with 16 billboards, each corresponding with one of the buildable monuments in *Doshin the Giant 1*. After urinating on a billboard, the screen prompts the player to switch the game disk with the *Doshin the Giant 1* disk to turn the billboards into amusement park-styled buildings. This exercise in tedium will likely take up more time than the gameplay itself. The rewards for this physical tribulation are low-resolution, black-and-white animated segments that tell the story of *Doshin the Giant 1*'s island inhabitants. Each segment is just a few seconds long, and though all 16 shorts create a cohesive narrative, their low quality does not feel like an adequate reward for so much effort. Unlocking each short also adds a shadow follower, ultimately allowing the player to tinkle on Doshin with enough force to help him outgrow his prison. Unfortunately, the constant disk swapping, lack of meaningful input on the player's part, and unappealing motivators for working through the overly simple objectives make completing Doshin's rescue squad feel like nothing more than a waste of time.

Reflections: I have always been a sucker for dream narratives and actually like the tiny but strange world the developers created for *Doshin the Giant: Tinkling Toddler Liberation Front! Assemble!* The lonely walkways, non-threatening but foreboding shadows, and the looming, immobile Doshin work in tandem to create a setting that truly feels like something conjured from the subconscious. It is a shame that this setting serves as little more than a vehicle for viewing crudely produced animations, as a title with actual gameplay in this world could have easily been something special. – CP





Case Artwork

Mario Artist: Communication Kit

Genre: Utility
Release Date: June 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: RandnetDD
Players: 1
Features: Disk Save, Capture Cassette, Nintendo 64 Mouse, Expansion Pak (required), Modem Cartridge (required), *Randnet Disk* (required)
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low

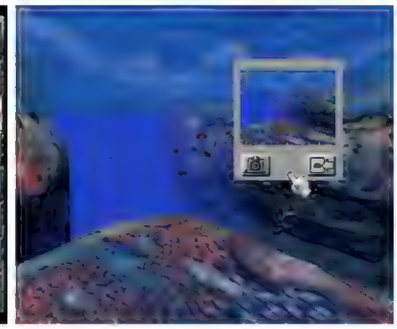
Creators can share custom works from other releases in the Mario Artist suite using this formerly online-enabled application. No creation tools are available here, as this software is purely a go-between that links certain 64DD games to the now-defunct Randnet service. Players first need to make 2D images, 3D polygon models, or custom animations using the separately sold titles in the Mario Artist series: *Polygon Studio*, *Talent Studio*, and *Paint Studio*. Save some work in those applications, then use this one to copy over favorite pieces and upload them to a public online gallery. Users could also browse content from other users, download items to their disks, and use them in their Mario Artist works. The N64 controller can be used to navigate this add-on, or the N64 Mouse can be plugged in for more precise control. The application is a natural fit for a mouse, as all sections are accessed using a cursor and clickable icons. It handles perfectly fine with the analog stick, though, and even comes with a few shortcuts, such as tapping the START button to instantly place the cursor over the Exit icon. In addition to offering uploading and downloading features, the application includes a selection of pre-made media to customize in the other Mario Artist titles. This media includes artwork, backgrounds, and models from *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. There are also several dozen exclusive creations that range from realistic human faces to cartoon sketches and images of bugs. Players can also plug in the 64DD Capture Cart to add bizarre visual effects to recorded videos. The application relies on Net Studio for all of its online interactions. Net Studio was part of Randnet, a subscription-based online service that shut down in 2001. While it was active, users could join or organize art contests with other members, interact on message boards, and even order physical postcards and papercraft prints of their artwork and polygon models. Sadly, this utility never had a chance to live up to its full potential.

Reflections: *Mario Artist: Communication Kit* was designed as an add-on for the eight-part Mario Artist series, but then half of those titles were canceled. It needed Randnet for online sharing and community activities, but Randnet shut down just eight months later. Today, this software can only be used to access its art and 3D models collection. If you imagine all of the requisite pieces being in place and operational, it is easy to see this utility facilitating some fun and unique social, creative experiences. – JBa

Case Artwork

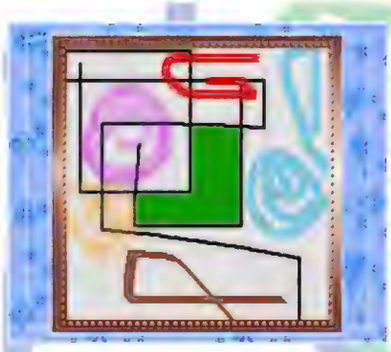
Mario Artist: Paint Studio

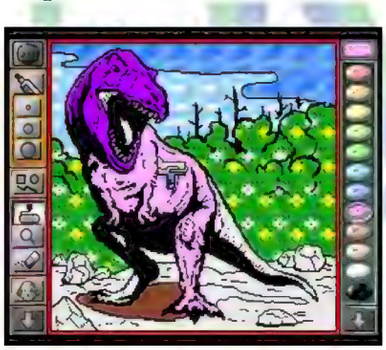
Genre: Creativity
Release Date: Dec. 1999
Region: JP
Dev.: Nintendo EAD, Software Creations
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Disk Save, Capture Cassette, Nintendo 64 Mouse, Transfer Pak, Expansion Pak (required)
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆☆

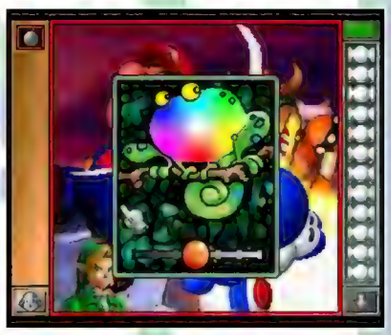


Let the inner artist come to life in this captivating 2D and 3D painting and drawing tool. Nearly every aspect of play is compatible with the originally included mouse controller and allows for easy point-and-click interactions. The standard control pad is naturally supported, with the analog stick moving the cursor and buttons to confirm and cancel selections. The 2D Paint mode lets up to four artists simultaneously draw on the same screen. Each will have command over a shared palette of tools and colors/patterns with which to draw and paint. There are markers, brushes, pens, a spray can, a flood fill tool, and erasers of different sizes. More powerful editing options are available to a single artist, including cut and paste, text overlays, special effects filters, and even a color mixer. If artists need inspiration, they can dig through several dozen pre-made stamps featuring artwork from various Mario, The Legend of Zelda, Star Fox, and Pokemon games, or import videos from the Capture Cassette or pictures from a Japanese Game Boy Camera to draw on via a Transfer Pak. For something a bit simpler, players can always open the coloring book and fill in pre-made sketches. Animate mode lets a single player create short animations frame by frame. The tools are limited to basic drawing and frame manipulation, but they do the job. 3D World mode plays short scenes that follow 3D fish in the ocean, dinosaurs in the Jurassic era, or a strange creature bounding across Mars. Artists can change certain textures in these scenes or even draw on textures and apply them to models. Grab a controller, and they can also move a character in third-person to walk/swim around these worlds and take photographs, though the controls are sluggish and collision detection is poor. Overall, it creates the perfect atmosphere for sitting on the couch and drawing some pictures. The experience is friendly, accessible, and has enough flexibility so that players won't get bored too easily. For those that have even a slight artistic streak, this collection of creative tools does a great job clearing out obstacles and making the experience relaxing and fun again.

Reflections: Tools like *Mario Artist: Paint Studio* and its spiritual predecessor, *Mario Paint* for the Super NES, make creativity approachable for anyone. They quell that feeling of dread some get when they sit in front of a blank canvas, knowing they want to be creative but not knowing how to start. There's always something to get you going in *Paint Studio*, whether it is a stamp, a pattern, a visual effect, or just the coloring book. Once you start playing, you quickly get into the creative mood, and the game has tools that are just powerful enough to let you do what you want without overwhelming you with complexity. – JBa





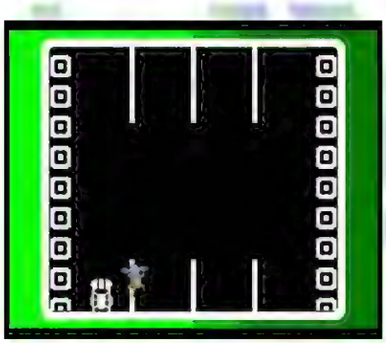


Case Artwork

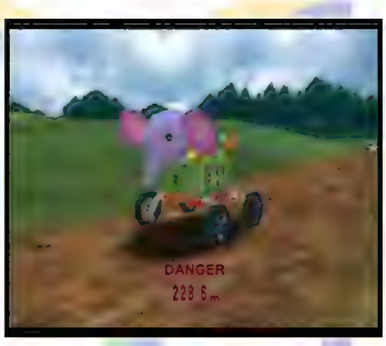
Mario Artist: Polygon Studio

Genre: Creativity
Release Date: Aug. 2000
Region: JP
Dev.: Nintendo R&D1, Nichimen Graphics
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Disk Save, Capture Cassette, Nintendo 64 Mouse, Expansion Pak (required)
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆☆

3D artists can craft and customize polygon creations in this detailed but beginner-friendly creativity application. Two main modes are available: Simple and Expert. In Simple, users choose a model and then select individual pieces by moving the cursor over them and pressing the A button. Artists can then move or rotate pieces around all three axes, scale them to different sizes, or swap parts out with replacements like a bird's beak or a pinchy robot's claw. Expert mode builds on this foundation with a large variety of additional tools, models, and options. Instead of prodding at a single model, it is possible to combine multiple pieces into a single creation. (Why not shove a pig in the middle of a boombox?) Fragments can be rotated, swapped, or scaled like before, but now the artist can cut, smooth, or remove edges and polygons individually. To get a better look at models in either mode, pressing the B button once will rotate the camera, and a second time will enable zooming. Once happy with the work, creations can be brought to a simple studio to swap out backdrops, customize lighting, or even paint them. Everything can be saved for later tweaking (or exporting to other Mario Artist games). Finally, a rudimentary "experiment" mode drops users into a 3D world where they can roam around as their custom model. However, there is little to do here beyond walking, jumping, and switching from first- to third-person camera views, but seeing the model in action is nice. When the creative juices just won't flow, artists can click the coffee cup icon to "take a break," which shoves the model into one of two mini-game modes that challenge players to simple action- and reflex-based diversions. While building and customizing 3D creations out of polygons sounds daunting, this studio turns it into an easy and fun task. The experience is somewhat hampered by the detailed interface that is not as friendly to controller users as N64 Mouse users, but with a little practice, either method works fine. If 2D painting doesn't satisfy the hunger for creativity, this polygon-based suite of tools will get the job done.



Reflections: *Polygon Studio* isn't as complex as the feature-rich *Talent Studio*, but it is not as simple as *Paint Studio*. Instead, this creativity tool walks the line between entry-level and professional and has options that could appeal to a wide variety of users, making it arguably the most refined release of the bunch. As an interesting bit of trivia, the mini-games in "take a break" mode directly inspired Nintendo's WarioWare series of comedic "microgame" collections. Not only do they play at the same quick-fire pace, but the very same games appear both here and in WarioWare titles. – JBa

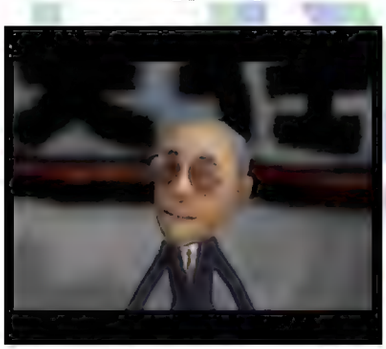


Case Artwork

Mario Artist: Talent Studio

Genre: Creativity
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Nintendo R&D1
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Disk Save, Capture Cassette, Nintendo 64 Mouse, Transfer Pak, Expansion Pak (required)
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

This full-featured creation tool lets anyone build 3D models, show them off in a series of pre-set actions and poses, and then make them a movie star. Artists start in the Talent Studio, where they can choose a model type by selecting from 15 characters ranging from sporty boys to older women to a chunky pink bunny. Artists can customize their hair, voice, face, skin tone, body size/shape, and more using an in-depth editor filled with dozens of options. Want a bald schoolgirl head with a beard on top of a giant mech body? The artist can do that, or they can get even weirder (or more normal). Artists can take that star to the Show Time room, where they can choose from a selection of 28 poses, dances, and other flashy moves and watch their character strut their stuff. The customized 3D model will do everything from flexing like a bodybuilder to performing a classical Japanese fan dance while the camera pans and pivots to give dramatic views. Back in Movie Studio mode, artists can choose one of the saved creations or pick from a selection of pre-made models and put them to work in a movie. Artists can choose the actors, choose a scene, select camera angles and movements, then build the movie frame by frame, doing everything from changing character expressions to adding dialogue and editing the final product. The scene editor is remarkably powerful in terms of its offerings and abilities. Outside of its creation options, there are features to set up a playlist and enter a theater where movies play back-to-back. Other functionality includes importing models and artwork from games in the Mario Artist series (*Polygon Studio* and *Paint Studio*) or images from the originally included Capture Cassette or Game Boy Camera (via Transfer Pak) and then applying them to model faces or using them as backdrops. Sadly, the interface is cluttered, cramped, and difficult to use with a controller, though that's a problem that can be alleviated somewhat with an N64 Mouse. Some of the musical tracks are annoying, but mercifully, they can be switched off. Outside of small issues, this title presents a fun, powerful, yet intimidating movie-making package.

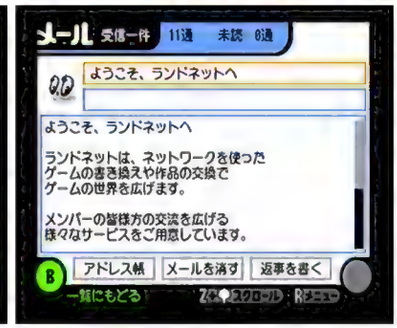


Reflections: Detailed editing and creation tools like *Mario Artist: Talent Studio* didn't exist for your average gamer back in the early 2000s. Even PC owners only had a few options. That Nintendo created something this detailed and functional for N64 owners is still something of a surprise. Most of the company's creative products fall on the simpler side – even *Talent Studio*'s sister releases, like *Paint Studio*, adhere to this philosophy. The sheer number of tools and the complexity of the interface give this creativity suite a pretty steep learning curve. But if you are patient and motivated, boy, can you make some great movies. – JBa

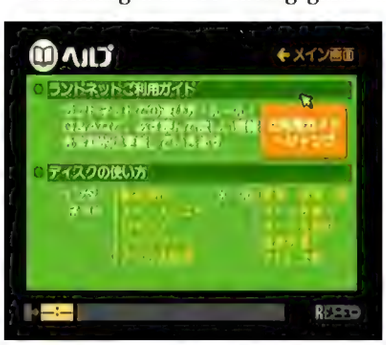
Case Artwork

Randnet Disk

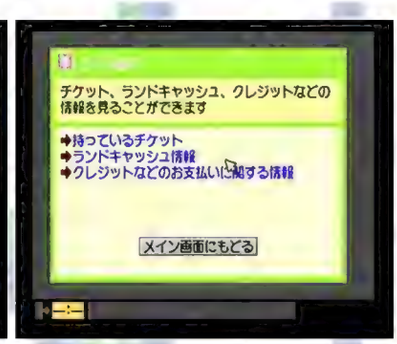
Genre: Utility
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: RandnetDD
Publisher: RandnetDD
Players: 1
Features: Nintendo 64 Keyboard, Nintendo 64 Mouse, Expansion Pak (required), Modem Cartridge (required)
Availability: Uncommon
Japanese Required: Medium



This subscription Randnet network was offered as part of the Randnet Starter Kit that included the 64DD and modem cartridge. Randnet provided online communications tools and special features for certain 64DD games. Users needed an active subscription (minimum ¥1,500 per month, or about $15) along with the required hardware to fully access the service. The optional N64 keyboard and mouse could also be used for faster typing and easier navigation. Once connected, the main screen delivered a News feed and Mail options along with DD Fan, Get Mall, and Net Zabun sections. DD Fan was essentially a message board where 64DD game owners could share tips and chat about their favorite releases without leaving their N64 console. There were also surveys, a Mario Artist Tip series, and character stamps to unlock and use in the Mail section. With Get Mall, players could shop online for 64DD software and N64 goods or create postcards that could be mailed anywhere in Japan for a fee. Net Zabun ("zabun" is the sound of waves crashing, playing on the whole web surfing motif) was a browser that featured access to the world wide web along with curated topics (anime, games, sports, etc.) stuffed with relevant links. Users could also access Rand-Bank to buy Rand-Cash with a credit card, allowing them to make faster purchases on Net Zabun and Get Mall. Several exclusive buyable items were promised for Net Zabun but never materialized, including a horse racing game and a printed baseball magazine.



The subscription service was initially scheduled to launch on December 1, 1999, alongside the 64DD. However, it was postponed. Early buyers had to wait three months before Randnet's online features would arrive, and even then, not all of the features were there. Nintendo promised Battle Mode, for example, which would let users play against each other online, and an Observation Mode that allowed spectating for certain games. Neither of these ever saw the light of day. The service struggled to attract members until November 2000 when RandnetDD, the joint venture between Nintendo and Recruit (and the source of the "Randnet" portmanteau – Recruit And NinteNDo NET), announced the service would cease accepting new members. The entire venture was shuttered soon after, just one year after its release. RandnetDD claimed around 15,000 active members at its peak, though some speculate the number was closer to 10,000. Several factors likely contributed to this demise, including the fact that the Nintendo 64's younger audience had to rely on parents to make credit card purchases and the lack of 64DD games. A Nintendo PR representative stated that low membership was probably due to the fast spread of online-enabled mobile phones at the time. However, it was more likely a conflation of factors, including the constant 64DD delays, the failure of the platform to adopt disc-based media, and the lack of titles released on it. Despite its unique features, Randnet could not overcome this market reality. – JBa



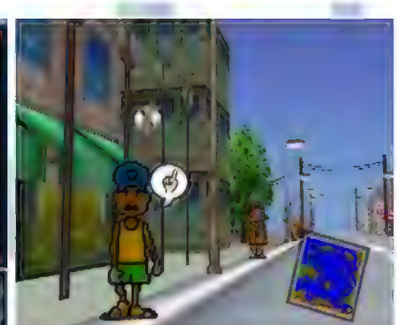
Case Artwork

SimCity 64

Genre: Simulation
Release Date: Feb. 2000
Region: JP
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Disk Save, Expansion Pak (required)
Availability: Very Uncommon
Japanese Required: Low
☆☆☆☆

Will Wright's ultimate city simulator makes the leap to 3D! The player's goal is to build the most populous and prosperous city possible, managing the placement and development of residential, commercial, and industrial zones. There are also power, infrastructure, and specialty buildings like fire departments and community parks. A simple cursor interface allows regions to be selected and highlights the space buildings require when placing them. The camera can be rotated, panned, and zoomed, giving the player ample control; this includes going completely overhead for players who prefer a top-down perspective. Graphs and maps allow the player to analyze trends in land value, pollution, crime, and other key metrics, helping inform decisions. Dr. Wright provides tips and a tutorial for new mayors. His in-game menu also handles tax rate adjustments, loans, service funding, and the enactment of regulations that range from parking tickets to city-wide ordinances. Particularly malicious mayors can even unleash disasters, such as fires and earthquakes, that devastate infrastructure and require focused planning to mitigate and recover from. Three modes are offered: Beginner, Scenario, and Free. In Beginner mode, Dr. Wright assigns specific tasks to complete within a time limit. These start simple but get more complicated as players can choose different tasks to pursue, such as widening city parks or adding an airport. For more experienced players, Scenario mode presents prebuilt towns with unique problems that need to be solved through keen planning and budgeting. There are 15 scenarios of various star-rated difficulties, with five initially available. Free mode allows the player to choose from 54 maps that range from traditional to esoteric. Three difficulty settings adjust starting funds, and disasters can be independently turned on and off for mayors who prefer not to be surprised by the occasional volcano eruption. Four time periods determine how advanced the available buildings are. Speed settings let players manage the passing of time; the pause feature is particularly helpful during scenarios. Plus, this edition is replete with small but entertaining features, such as boarding a train or helicopter to view the city or a mini-game where the player strolls the town in first person while trying to find a specific SimCitizen. If the player has *Mario Artist: Paint Studio*, they can import an animated character. Periods of engine slowdown and fewer construction options than earlier entries do not spoil the experience, but they are setbacks that might lead some mayors to venture elsewhere.

Reflections: *SimCity* for the SNES was a masterpiece of polish. While HAL's efforts on *SimCity 64* are not bad, especially for their 3D ambitions, it relies more on novelty than rock-solid play. It may seem closer to its 1999 PC contemporary *SimCity 3000* with its bright buttons, yet it more closely reflects *SimCity 2000* in its civic toolkit. The ability to amble about the city (or above it, ala *SimCopter*) is a welcome use of the 3D features and a sure-fire reason to try this one. There are just too many great editions of SimCity to settle for a merely good one. – DG



Case Artwork

Unreleased Nintendo 64 Games

By Tony Visintainer

The video game generation of the Nintendo 64 was transitional. Studios were determining how to properly develop content for 3D capable machines and hoping their 2D, sprite-based franchises could make the jump. Many titles were promised, hyped, and never released. In some cases, games were officially canceled. In others, they were simply never mentioned again, leaving fans to speculate. Then, of course, there are instances of software in development that transformed or shifted platforms. For example, *Kirby Air Ride* and *Eternal Darkness* started development as N64 games and made their way to GameCube, while titles like *Panel de Pon 64* evolved into *Pokémon Puzzle League*. It was a time of big ideas, big promises, and emerging home technology. The unreleased titles covered in this section are examples of the collateral damage.

Some of the titles covered here have been preserved and are playable today. However, many others have yet to be and are currently considered lost media. In these cases, information relies on any press the game may have received during its development. Unfortunately, in many instances, preservation can be a race against time. This is especially true of the 64DD content stored on vulnerable magnetic disks. Please note that some listed special game features, such as save type and Rumble Pak support, are best guesses based on available data.

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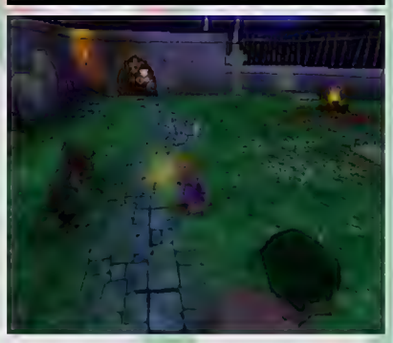
Tony Visintainer is one of the producers of Hard4Games, a retro-gaming-focused channel on YouTube. Early on, they became fascinated with the Nintendo 64 era. It represented as much of an evolutionary time in the gaming industry as it did a shift in their childhoods toward adolescence. Diving deeper, they became fascinated with its lost media and titles, both via the cartridge format and the long-promised but never-delivered Nintendo 64DD. This interest evolved into collecting development hardware and eventually dumping (i.e., preserving) lost software and early builds from the N64 era and beyond.

If you have non-final Nintendo 64 software, reach out and get it preserved. Tony can be contacted on Twitter @hard4games.

40 Winks

Genre: Action-Platformer
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Eurocom Developments
Publisher: GT Interactive
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (optional)



This 3D action-platformer has players control a brother/sister duo, Ruff and Tumble, as they adventure through Dreamland. *40 Winks* did receive a release on the PlayStation. However, the N64 version was canceled due to its poor sales. Piko Interactive, a publisher of unreleased titles, acquired the rights and released it via physical cartridge in 2019. The N64 version features two-player cooperative play and 4MB Expansion Pak compatibility.

64 Wars

Genre: Strategy, RPG
Region: JP
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: Unknown
Features: Game Pak Save, Transfer Pak

Not much is known about this cartoony game's cancellation or development history. *64 Wars* was a planned sequel in the turn-based, strategic Wars series, which includes the popular *Famicom Wars* title for Nintendo's 8-bit system. The title was sparsely shown during development and was canceled without any official word from Nintendo or the developer. It was originally planned to link with *Game Boy Wars 2* via the Transfer Pak.

Blade & Barrel Ultra Combat (alt.)

Genre: Shooter
Region: Unknown
Developer: Software Creations
Publisher: Kemco
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Unknown

This was to be an early title in the N64's library that never came to be. Originally meant to be an update for the Atari classic *Combat*, *Blade & Barrel* evolved into a third-person vehicular shooter. Magazine previews and video trailers revealed impressive effects for the time. It is not known why it was canceled, although it is assumed that some elements may have made their way into another Kemco-developed title: *Knife Edge: Nose Gunner*, which was released on the console in 1998.

Blades of Passage

Genre: Action-RPG
Region: NA
Developer: Pixelplay
Publisher: Unknown
Players: Unknown
Features: 64DD, Disk Save, Expansion Pak (required)

This was originally a 64DD project aiming to be included in the peripheral's launch lineup. As Pixelplay's only project, *Blades of Passage* was an action-RPG experience with a *Secret of Mana* influence. The delay and cancellation of the US 64DD launch, combined with delays in development, led to the game's demise as well as a major directional switch for the company. The studio reformed into Orbital Media and turned its focus entirely to Nintendo's upcoming handheld, the Game Boy Advance.

Unreleased Nintendo 64 Games

Buggie Boogie

Genre: Racing, Vehicular Combat
Region: Unknown
Developer: Angel Studios
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save

Angel Studios would eventually become Rockstar San Diego, but during the reign of the N64, their internal development team worked on this failed project. *Boogie Buggie* was being created with direct input from Shigeru Miyamoto, who would check in on the project every three months and, if promising, extend the contract with the studio. The gameplay was unique, with the player's vehicle defeating and consuming the properties or powers of other vehicles. Although details of the cancellation are vague, it is known that Nintendo and Miyamoto eventually canned the project to switch the studio's focus to another title.

Cabbage

Genre: Simulation
Region: Unknown
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: 64DD, Disk Save, 64GB Cable, Expansion Pak (required)

This virtual pet title was a personal project of Shigeru Miyamoto and other high-level talent at Nintendo. It was designed for the 64DD and would have utilized the DD's internal clock, Game Boy connectivity for on-the-go play, and additional content via expansion disks. The Game Boy linking was likely via the unreleased 64GB Cable. This linking option ran from the N64's controller port into a compatible Game Boy cartridge. The cartridge itself would have an input port and be capable of receiving and recording information from the N64. Aspects of *Cabbage* heavily influenced *Animal Forest* (*Animal Crossing*) and *Nintendogs*. Although spoken of and referenced frequently in interviews, no screenshots were ever made public, nor was any reason given for cancellation. The game was a bit of an "idea board" for Nintendo's staff as well as an internal favorite.

Carnivale: Cenzo's Adventure

Genre: Action
Region: PAL
Developer: TerraGlyph Interactive Studios
Publisher: Vatical Entertainment
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Password Save, Rumble Pak

The title is based on an animated film of the same name, which received a limited release in certain European countries. Carnivale follows the plot of the film: a group of friends must escape an evil carnival, with scenarios located in different areas of the carnival. These sections would have provided the player with multiple genres of play, including racing, mini-games, and puzzles. It also included a two-player simultaneous kart racing option. Unfortunately, due to financial troubles and a company reorganization, the developer could not complete the project. The publisher, Vatical Entertainment, decided not to pursue it further.

Dezaemon 3D Expansion

Genre: Creativity, Shooter
Region: JP
Developer: Athena
Publisher: Athena
Players: 1
Features: 64DD, Disk Save, *Dezaemon 3D* (required), Expansion Pak (required)

Dezaemon 3D is a build-your-own shooter program that was released in Japan, but the expansion 64DD disk never made it to store shelves. However, multiple copies have been found and preserved. The addition of the disk greatly increases game storage for stages, user-edited models, music, animations, etc. The expansion disk provided no new content, only space for more user-generated content. It was likely canceled due to the very late release and low adoption rate of the 64DD.

Die Hard 64

Genre: First-Person Shooter
Region: Unknown
Developer: Bits Studios
Publisher: Fox Interactive
Players: Unknown
Features: Controller Pak Save

This first-person shooter was based on the beloved Die Hard film franchise. Thought to be lost forever, 2017 saw multiple builds of *Die Hard 64* preserved and released online. Although the N64 version was canceled, the title eventually evolved beyond the fifth generation of hardware to become *Die Hard: Vendetta* on GameCube, Xbox, and PlayStation 2.

Dinosaur Planet

Genre: Action-Adventure
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save, Expansion Pak (required)

This title was to be a sprawling action-adventure experience. *Dinosaur Planet* was an original IP for most of its development until it was requested (allegedly by Shigeru Miyamoto) to convert it to exist within the Star Fox universe, replacing one of the protagonists (Sabre) with Fox McCloud. This change became what is now known as *Star Fox Adventures* on GameCube. The mechanics (aside from the Arwing battles), locations, and gameplay were largely kept intact. However, the shift significantly altered the story and character motivations and eliminated the two-protagonist character swapping the original title would have featured. A version of the game leaked online showcases the beginning of the franchise transition with Fox McCloud's model. However, it was still early enough that Fox is referred to in-game as Sabre.

Dragon Sword

Genre: Action-Adventure
Region: Unknown
Developer: Interactive Studios (Team Storm)
Publisher: MGM Interactive
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak

This title was an action-adventure dungeon crawler akin to *Gauntlet Legends*. Before its cancellation, the British publication *64 Magazine* received a preview copy and reviewed it favorably. Despite this, *Dragon Sword* was canceled out of profitability fears by its would-be publisher, MGM Interactive. In 2019, Piko Interactive acquired both the rights and source code of the game to complete it.

EarthBound 64 (NA, EU)
MOTHER 3: Fall of the Pig King (JP)

Genre: RPG
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Hal Laboratory
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Disk Save (if N64DD) Game Pak Save (if N64), Expansion Pak (required for 64DD)

This release was to be the third installment in Shigesato Itoi's quirky RPG series and the second planned for Western audiences under the "EarthBound" moniker. *EarthBound 64*'s development was filled with fanfare, expectations, and constant delays. The game itself experienced multiple platform shifts, from the Super Famicom to the 64DD and, finally, a standard N64 cartridge. During this time, the title was forced through scenario adjustments and cutbacks intended to make the epic adventure more reasonable for the team to complete. Unfortunately, after numerous delays and with GameCube on the horizon, Nintendo wanted to focus resources on their next generation of video games. It was officially canceled in August 2000. Years later, *Earthbound 64* ultimately saw one final platform shift to the Game Boy Advance and a Japanese release in April 2006, during the Game Boy Advance's twilight years. Although much of the scenario is similar, how much was altered or removed for the handheld iteration remains a mystery.

Emperor of the Jungle (NA, EU)
Junguru Taitei 64 (JP)

Genre: Action-Adventure
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Disk Save (if 64DD), Game Pak Save (if N64)

Emperor of the Jungle is based on the manga and anime *Janguru Taitei* (*Jungle Emperor*). This title was announced during Space World 1996 and was developed with the involvement of Makoto Tezuka (the son of the IP's creator) and Shigeru Miyamoto. The only existing gameplay footage is from a short promotional video from which all other still images were seemingly sourced. It was canceled quietly in part due to Makoto's inexperience with video games and his increasingly tight schedule.

Fire Emblem: Maiden of Darkness
Fire Emblem 64 (alt.)

Genre: Strategy, RPG
Region: JP
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Disk Save (if 64DD), Game Pak Save (if N64)

This was the would-be sequel to the popular tactical RPG series spanning the Famicom, Super Famicom, and Game Boy. Very little is known about *Fire Emblem*'s development, as Nintendo and Shigeru Miyamoto himself were particularly coy regarding details. The designer, Shouzou Kaga, was quoted as saying the title was too ambitious for the N64 hardware. When canceled, it would be confirmed that these issues were largely to blame. No images or previews were released during development. Years later, fans would get their first look at the game in Nintendo and Intelligent Systems' book, *The Making of Fire Emblem – 25th Anniversary Development Secrets, Awakening and Fates*. It included concept art and the only known screenshot of the game. The book also revealed that the game would eventually be heavily reworked into *Fire Emblem: The Binding Blade* for Game Boy Advance.

Freak Boy

Genre: Platformer
Region: Unknown
Developer: Zono
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Players: 1
Features: Unknown

Freak Boy is a bizarre 3D puzzle-platformer consisting of sections of the protagonist's body (head, torso, and legs) absorbing objects to obtain new powers and abilities. New color-coded body parts allowed the player access to bombs, drills, and other tools, which were used to defeat enemies and solve puzzles throughout the alien world. Publisher Virgin Interactive was unhappy with *Freak Boy*'s progress and requested it be rebuilt from scratch on multiple occasions. After numerous delays, they ultimately dropped the project entirely.

Glover 2
Genre: Platformer
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Interactive Studios
Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save

In this 3D sequel, the player again controls a magical glove that maneuvers balls and other objects to solve puzzles and platform from level to level. The original *Glover* sold moderately well, but Hasbro had over-purchased N64 cartridges, leaving a significant amount of unmovable stock. Due to this internal blunder, the company became trepidatious regarding *Glover 2*. Ultimately, it was canceled at around 80% completion due to these financial issues.

Harrier 2001
Genre: Shooter
Region: Unknown
Dev.: Paradigm Entertainment
Publisher: Video System
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak

From the makers of *Pilotwings 64*, *Harrier 2001* was to be a combat flight simulator that boasted a large variety of missions, a four-player multiplayer mode, and beautiful visuals for the time. The title was originally expected to land in 1999 but experienced continued delays and name changes, including *Flights of the UN* and *Harrier 2000*. Unfortunately, Video System eventually cut all funding, forcing Paradigm to stop development and sue Video System for breach of contract.

Hype: The Time Quest
Genre: Action-Adventure
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Ubisoft
Players: 1
Features: Unknown

Hype: The Time Quest was a PC game tie-in for the Playmobil toy line. Gameplay is of an action-adventure structure, with a distinct focus on a younger audience. Shown at E3 1998, the Nintendo 64 port was never released, and Ubisoft never gave an official reason as to why. However, a Game Boy Color version was completed and well-reviewed, and a PlayStation 2 port was also released.

Jest
Genre: Action-Platformer
Region: Unknown
Developer: Curved Logic
Publisher: Ocean Software
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save

The player becomes an apprentice joker as they adventure through a humorous and varied world in this action-platformer. The goal is to power up and ultimately transcend from "Joker" to "Jester." To do so, the player must battle other jokers, mages, and the most powerful jester of all, Tarot. *Jest* had beautifully designed environments and was advertised frequently in gaming publications and VHS promotional tapes. It is unknown why *Jest* was canceled, but the developer went out of business shortly afterward.

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Master Quest
Zelda Ura (alt.)
Genre: Action-Adventure
Region: Unknown
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: 64DD, Disk Save, Rumble Pak, Expansion Pak (required)

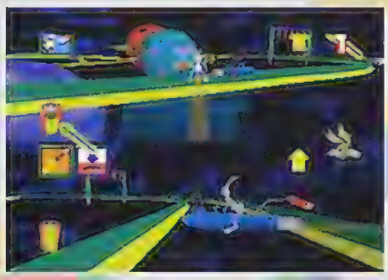
Within the *The Zelda: Ocarina of Time* fandom, this is one of the most talked about, yet least understood, pieces of software. *Ura* (meaning "backside, other side, or alternate" in Japanese) was a 64DD expansion planned for *Ocarina of Time*. The add-on was frequently spoken of in interviews, yet no official screenshots were ever shown. Despite press speculation and hints of new game content, items, actions, etc., the software never materialized within the lifespan of the Nintendo 64. This was likely due to the failure of the 64DD as well as Nintendo's focus on *Ocarina*'s true sequel, *Majora's Mask*.

In November of 2002, the *Ocarina of Time Master Quest* (Japanese name: *Zelda no Densetsu: Toki no Okarina GC Ura*) was released on GameCube as part of a bonus disc included for pre-ordering *The Wind Waker*. The title featured a higher level of difficulty and rearranged dungeons. Fans debated whether *Master Quest* was the full & complete Ura, or merely a quick re-edit to satiate players.

The debate continued for years after its initial release until fans began to dive deeper into *Ocarina of Time*'s ROM to understand more details regarding its planned 64DD connectivity. Despite the previous hype surrounding new content, the code indicated that the 64DD swappable areas focused on dungeons. Therefore, no new items, story, characters, or other elements could be easily added to the retail game, despite any earlier intention to do so.

Looney Tunes: Space Race

Genre: Racing
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: New Wave USA
Publisher: Infogrames
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save



This kart racing experience has players getting to ride missiles! Originally announced for the N64, *Looney Tunes: Space Race* was ultimately released on the Dreamcast and later ported to the PlayStation 2. Since the development team switched between platforms, it is unclear how similar the N64 game would have been to the released versions.

Maker Series (Sound Maker, Video Jockey Maker, Graphical Message Maker, Game Maker)

Genre: Creativity
Region: JP
Developer: RandnetDD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: Unknown
Features: 64DD, Disk Save, N64 Modem, Expansion Pak (required)

The "Maker Series" consisted of four 64DD titles akin to, but separate from, the Mario Artist Studio games. In a confusing move, during beta, the Mario Artist titles were also referred to as "Maker" (*Mario Artist Picture Maker*, *Mario Artist Talent Maker*, *Mario Artist Polygon Maker*, and the canceled *Mario Artist Sound Maker*). However, these names were changed before release. The Maker Series was developed by RandnetDD, which was created as a partnership between Nintendo and Recruit to manage the 64DD and its online services. Similar to the Mario Artist games, these likely would have had inter-game connectivity, allowing player creations to be transferred and combined. It is unknown why the series was canceled, but it is likely due to the short lifespan of the N64DD and its Randent internet service. No software images or videos have ever been publicly released.

Mortal Kombat: Special Forces

Genre: Action-Adventure
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: Midway Games
Publisher: Midway Games
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save

This action-adventure spin-off from the fighting series had a troubled development cycle, which included the departure of series co-creator John Tobias. *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces* was eventually released in a heavily altered and stripped-down form for the PlayStation. The gaming press panned the title upon release, so subsequent ports to N64 and Dreamcast were canceled outright. To this day, the PlayStation release is generally regarded as one of the worst entries in the Mortal Kombat series.

O.D.T.: (Escape... Or Die Trying)

Genre: Action-Adventure
Region: NA, PAL
Developer: FDI
Publisher: Psygnosis
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak

This action title contained a sprinkle of RPG elements. Released for the PC and PlayStation, *O.D.T.* allows the player to choose from 4 different protagonists with various fighting styles and attributes. An N64 version was apparently completed but never released.

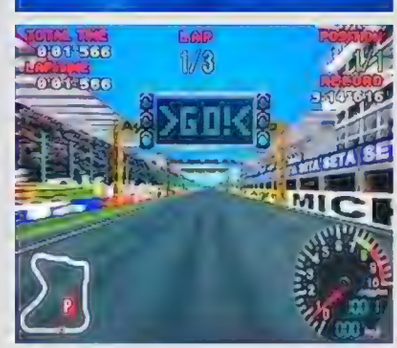
Oriental Blue

Genre: RPG
Region: JP
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Players: 1
Features: 64DD, Disk Save, Expansion Pak (required)

One of the few RPGs planned for the N64/64DD, *Oriental Blue* was to be a game in the Far East of Eden (Tengai Makyō) series. Due to the constant delays and eventual failure of the 64DD, Hudson quietly reworked the title for the Game Boy Advance as *Oriental Blue: Ao no Tengai*. The existence of the N64 version is known via press interviews, but no game screenshots were ever published.

Rev Limit

Genre: Racing
Region: Unknown
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: Multiplayer
Features: 64DD, Disk Save, Expansion Pak (required)



This sim racing title was announced early in the life cycle of the N64. *Rev Limit* was planned simultaneously for the 64DD and arcade (via the custom Aleck 64 board) and, eventually, the standard Nintendo 64. The 64DD iteration supposedly would have allowed players to customize both tracks and racecars. Despite being delayed multiple times, the title had progressed far enough to be shown off at Shoshinkai 1996 and Space Word 1997. *Rev Limit* was likely canceled due to development delays and SETA's financial difficulties.

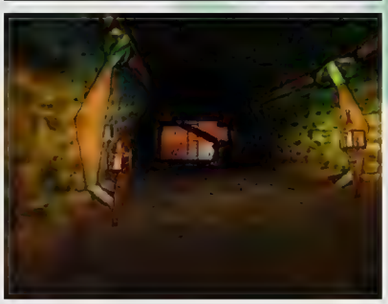
Riqa
Genre: Third-Person Shooter
Region: Unknown
Developer: Bits Studios
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Features: Game Pak Save

The gaming press hyped it as "The N64's *Tomb Raider*" due to its third-person perspective, action elements, and female protagonist showcased in promotional content. In reality, there were actually three playable characters – two females and one male. Despite the anticipation, *Riqa* was continuously delayed and could not be completed within the N64's lifespan, leading to cancellation.

Robotech: Crystal Dreams
Genre: Action
Region: Unknown
Developer: GameTek
Publisher: GameTek
Players: 1-4
Features: Controller Pak Save, Rumble Pak

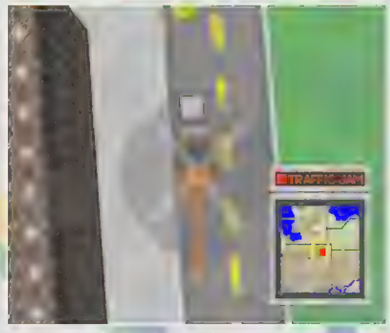
This ambitious mecha flight simulator would have the player become a mercenary, completing missions for credits to allow the purchase of mech upgrades and modifications. *Robotech: Crystal Dreams* was intended to have huge, branching environments, a four-player battle mode, resource management, and more. Consistent release delays and the developer's bankruptcy forced the game into cancellation.

Shadowgate Rising
Genre: Adventure
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Infinite Ventures
Publisher: None
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save



This unreleased sequel to *Shadowgate 64: Trials of the Four Towers* takes place centuries later. The player controls a young woman who discovers her strange powers, including the ability to manipulate magical artifacts. Kemco published *Trials of the Four Towers* but opted against the sequel. Unfortunately, developer Infinite Ventures was unable to secure a new publishing deal. It is also reported that since the original's release in 1999, the console generation transition may have affected the sequel's development and cancellation.

SimCopter 64
Genre: Action, Simulation
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Maxis
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save



This helicopter simulation was an ambitious attempt to port Maxis' PC title *SimCopter* to consoles. A proof-of-concept demo was first shown at E3 in 1997. Players could explore 30 selectable cities and perform two basic emergency missions. Although initial builds were paced leisurely, it is reported that later revisions added a timer, greater mission variety, and a brighter, more cartoonish atmosphere. As development matured, there were reports of potential inter-game connectivity with *SimCity 64* (64DD), allowing players to import and explore their own cities. Ultimately, *SimCopter 64* was canceled, likely due to an overall lack of focus and direction.

Slick RC (final name Mini Racers Tamiya Racing 64
Genre: Racing
Region: Unknown
Developer: Looking Glass Studio
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak

Due to their intense similarities, *Tamiya Racing 64* is assumed to be a tech demo for *Mini Racers*, a toy-car racing title. *Mini Racers* was announced in 1998, and by 1999, it received a name change that could be translated to "Slick RC." It was believed to have fallen victim to multiple delays until its ultimate cancellation. Years later, a developer interview claimed that the game was, in fact, completed.

Spooky
Genre: Action-Adventure
Region: Unknown
Developer: ICE
Publisher: None
Players: 1
Features: Unknown

This action-adventure tasked the player to navigate a foreign and desolated world controlled by an evil alien, Arch-Morph. The player relied on their metamorphic abilities to explore, solve puzzles, and ultimately recover 30 pieces of a special mirror in order to confront the final boss. *Spooky* was canceled without any official statement, but troublesome N64 sales at the time likely contributed to its demise.

Super Mario 64 Sequel
Genre: Platformer
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Game Pak Save, Rumble Pak

The much-anticipated sequel to the revolutionary 3D platformer *Super Mario 64* was mentioned by Shigeru Miyamoto numerous times, notably via interviews in *Nintendo Power* and Japanese publication *The 64Dream*. Reported features and information were vague and would frequently change based on the timeframe. For example, multiplayer functionality and being able to ride Yoshi were teased. Unfortunately, no screenshots were ever public, and it is likely that the project progressed only as far as internal gameplay demos.

Survivor: Day One
Genre: Action
Region: Unknown
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Features: Controller Pak Save

The player was tasked to escape an alien-infested ship via third-person gameplay. Jumping, climbing, running, shooting, and solving puzzles were necessary to survive and progress. IGN reported the enemy AI to be particularly advanced for the N64, with enemies running and hiding if their health became too low or they found themselves in an unwinnable situation. Announced during E3 of 1998, *Survivor: Day One*'s development progressed slowly and could not be completed before the end of the N64's lifecycle.

Teo 64
Genre: Simulation
Region: Unknown
Developer: Marigul Management
Publisher: Fujitsu Interactive
Players: 1
Features: 64DD, Disk Save, VRU Mic, Expansion Pak (required)

This virtual pet game simulation had the player interact with Fin Fin, a magical dolphin/bird hybrid. Players would use the Marigul-developed N64 microphone, which was also used with *Hey You, Pikachu! Teo 64* was based on the PC title *Fin Fin on Teo the Magic Planet* but was touted to be a unique game, not a direct port. No screenshots or videos were ever released. The cancellation was likely due to the 64DD's continued delay and failure.

Toon Panic
Genre: Fighting
Region: Unknown
Developer: Bottom Up
Publisher: Unknown
Players: 1-4 (simultaneous)
Features: Unknown

Toon Panic was a 3D arena brawler that was not announced nor made public in any way during active development. Knowledge of its existence came years later after a very early game build was discovered. Strangely enough, the build includes *Final Fantasy VIII* character portraits as image placeholders for certain fighters. It is unknown why it was canceled.

Top Gun 64
Genre: Shooter
Region: JP, NA, PAL
Developer: Spectrum Holobyte
Publisher: Spectrum Holobyte
Players: 1
Features: Unknown

This air combat simulation was originally pitched for the N64. The licensed project had a return of major characters from the *Top Gun* film but with an expanded and unique storyline. Ultimately, *Top Gun 64* was retitled *Top Gun: Fire at Will* and released only on the PlayStation and PC due to poor N64 sales at that point.

Variant Schwanzer
Genre: Shooter
Region: JP
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)

Developed for the Aleck64 arcade hardware, this vertical shooter consists of the "Schwanzer" ship having a normal shot and a secondary "Variant" shot that captures and fuses an enemy to the player's ship, resulting in receiving one of three weapons and special attacks. *Variant Schwanzer* was finished but never released.

Viewpoint 2064
Genre: Shooter
Region: Unknown
Developer: Racdym
Publisher: Sammy
Players: 1
Features: Rumble Pak

This title is Sammy's would-be sequel to the isometric shooter *Viewpoint*, released in 1992 on the NEO GEO arcade platform. *Viewpoint 2064* would have been one of the few space shooters on the N64, with gameplay combining that of a vertical shooter and something resembling *Star Fox 64*. Development suffered numerous delays, and it was quietly canceled in 2001.

WildWaters: Extreme Kayak
Genre: Racing
Region: Unknown
Developer: Looking Glass Studio
Publisher: Ubisoft
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
Features: Controller Pak Save, Expansion Pak (required)

This kayaking experience included multiple playable characters and realistic water effects. *WildWaters* would have been among the few N64 titles requiring the Expansion Pak. The additional 4MB of RAM was used, in part, to render the advanced water effects. *WildWaters* was canceled after the developer declared bankruptcy.

Nintendo 64 Technology

By Daniel Greenberg – Professor of Game Design, George Mason University

Where It Came From

The story of the technology behind the Nintendo 64 starts in Mountain View, California, in the early 1980s. Nestled in Silicon Valley, the aptly named Silicon Graphics Computer Systems (SGCS, later SGI) were specialists in hardware and software designed to produce 3D models. Their implementations were the sorts of workstations explicitly intended for industry professionals looking to make cutting-edge graphics for commercial projects. A leader in various 3D applications throughout the '80s, SGI was looking to enter the video game market as the '90s rolled around and home computer hardware started to catch up to their specialized workstations. On the other hand, consoles were an open frontier just beginning to test their hand at 3D, which presented an opening for SGI to get into the burgeoning market.

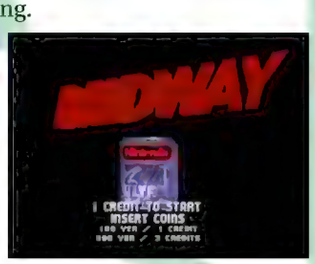
In 1993, Nintendo and SGI agreed to collaborate on their upcoming console. Codenamed Project Reality, the console was announced by the two companies in early 1994. In a move that bucked the day's trends, the announcement included the fact that the N64 would not leverage the new and increasingly popular compact disc but instead stuck with cartridges.*

* *This decision spirals off into plenty of other consequences, including Nintendo pulling out of the Sony deal, setting in motion the creation of the PlayStation, not to mention licensing out to Philips and the resulting Mario and Zelda CD-i games… but those are topics for another time!*

Cartridge use doesn't mean the Nintendo 64 was a hardware lightweight. Quite the contrary – SGI was known for expensive, enterprise-level hardware solutions and graphics rendering for major motion pictures, so squeezing that kind of spec into a home console was an ambitious play. The console development wasn't completed until 1995, but complications in developing games for the new system's launch held the official release date back multiple times. Finally, the N64 was released to the market in 1996, leading with an aggressively low $250 US price point for a system featuring, but not limited to, real-time texture mapping with perspective correction, trilinear interpolation mipmapping to scale and blend textures over distances, and anti-aliasing.

So what was the Ultra 64, anyway?

Arcade games like *Cruis'n USA* and *Killer Instinct* were cabinets that featured the Ultra 64 hardware branding. However, the cabinets themselves did not run on identical hardware to the Nintendo 64's ultimate design. So, more than anything else, they became a sort of marketing for what Nintendo was cooking up with SGI. Both were intended to be launch titles for the system, but neither franchise would hit the Nintendo 64 until 1996. While *Cruis'n USA* was ported in (largely) its original form, the first *Killer Instinct* was instead ported to the Super Nintendo and Game Boy. Its follow-up, *Killer Instinct 2*, brought the series to the N64 in the form of *Killer Instinct Gold*.



Both *Killer Instinct* and *Cruis'n USA* in the arcade promised exclusive Ultra 64 releases in 1995 during their attract modes.

The Hardware Behind Developing N64 Games

Before the release of the N64, the system's earliest game creators developed on SGI Onyx machines – massive enterprise-level workstations designed to build for Project Reality. These units cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and sported multiple CPUs, each clocked up to 50% faster than the N64's onboard chip. They also packed the RealityEngine 2 GPU's punch and hundreds of megabytes of RAM. Thanks to this, pre-release builds of games could run far more impressively on an Onyx than their finalized equivalents on the N64, with higher framerates and larger resolutions. However, the workstations had to factor in a software emulation layer until the prototypes for the actual N64 board were completed. These Onyx stations were responsible for some of the earliest demos for Project Reality, including the famous "shark demo," where a player could navigate the ocean depths, highlighted during the Consumer Electronics Show in 1994.

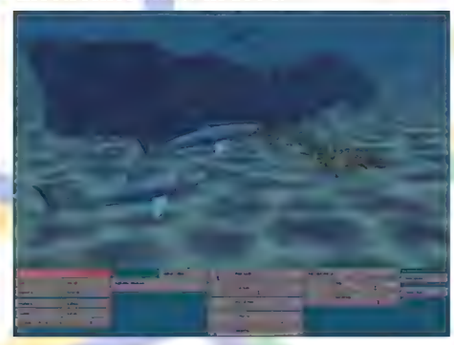


Image of the shark demo.

By the middle of 1995, the N64's hardware design was complete, as was a solution for developers to work in a more authentic environment. SGI's Indy line of workstations retailed at a much more reasonable $5000 each. In July, the Nintendo Ultra64's first revision was manufactured and installed inside SGI Indy kits as an expansion board. With the Indy's 16 or 32 megabytes of RAM, there was sufficient onboard memory to load an entire ROM onto the machine, making the workstation a prime environment to develop and test Nintendo 64 games. By the fall of 1996, aspiring developers could purchase these kits directly from Nintendo.

SGI Indy System with Nintendo Ultra64 dev kit. (photo by Christopher Miller)

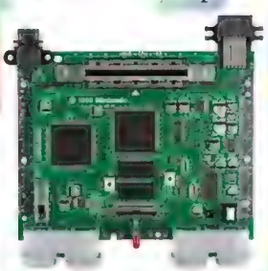
To further improve the development experience for the complex system, the software development kit (SDK) was revised yet again, this time by Kyoto Microcomputer, who built the PARTNER-N64. This solution leveraged an original (but modded) N64 plugged into a Windows PC via a dedicated ISA board or SGI computer using a specific hub and network adapter. The console and computer were linked via a development test cart and parallel ribbon cable running from the test cart to the Interface BOX and then to the workstation via network cable. The setup required a null-modem style serial connection to configure the Interface BOX via a command-line terminal session. PARTNER-N64 came bundled with the Metrowerks SDK and supported stack traces, on-the-fly reference/editing of values in memory, up to 15 breakpoints for source code (with additional breakpoints at the hardware level) for troubleshooting, and other quality-of-life improvements for developers.

Standardized and open-source elements of the N64's coding also led to some unofficial solutions. These third-party development methods mostly centered around creating the game on a PC and transferring the ROM to a cartridge for testing.

An early example of open-source success, OpenGL was a revised version of SiliconGraphics' proprietary IRIS GL, an application programming interface (API) for working with the system's 3D graphics. This decision gave SGI a licensable 3D graphics system that would work across several platforms with broad buy-in from multiple industries. The OpenGL standard remains a powerhouse, competing with Microsoft's DirectX standard.

The N64 Hardware

The Nintendo 64's design begins with a single, machined motherboard. Wrapped in its iconic plastic shell and anchored to large metal heatsinks, the mainboard is a tight, efficient little rectangle of computer power. The electrical engineering here is carefully designed, with no wiring, an impact-resistant cartridge slot, and plenty of screws to help the console withstand the rigors of enthusiastic gamers of all ages. Each of the system's three big chips – the processor, coprocessor, and memory – is manufactured by NEC. These are topped with heatsink blocks to help pull their generated heat off the chips and into the large heatsink that rests atop the console's internals.



The top of the Nintendo 64 motherboard. (photo by Evan Amos, Vanamo Online Game Museum)

The processor (CPU-NUS A)* is a 64-bit MIPS CPU based on the R4300 that clocks in at just under 100 MHz. Despite its capacity and the system's branding, developers would commonly use it in 32-bit mode for smaller operations better suited to its limited cache, onboard memory, and cartridge size. Still, despite being the highest-clocked chip on the board, the Nintendo 64's processor has to share the spotlight with another MIPS chip that anchors its very design.

** The "NUS" prefix appears on a number of the console's chips. This acronym stands for "Nintendo Ultra Sixty-four" and is also used for hardware, accessories, and cartridge codes.*

At the heart of the N64's hardware is the Reality Coprocessor (RCP-NUS). A 128-bit bus with a 1GB transfer rate, this custom MIPS R4000 32-bit chip is the workhorse of the N64. The RCP supports up to 16 million colors and 640x480 resolution support, depending on the display mode. The RCP houses two distinct processors: the Reality Signal Processor and the Reality Drawing Processor (RSP and RDP). These two halves run in parallel, producing the audiovisual signal, sending and receiving serialized controller data, reading/writing to the game cartridge, and communicating with the CPU as it performs its assigned task lists. In addition, the RCP serves as the point of entry for controller signals, manages reading data from the Game Pak, reads and writes to the system's RDRAM, coordinates with the CPU, and passes audiovisual signals to their appropriate converter(s). That's a busy chip!

Graphics Get Real

The Reality CoProcessor uses a basic three-step Model View Projection pipeline to convert the 3D assets that its RSP renders into the picture the RDP passes along to display on the television. Each step is defined by a 4x4 matrix, whose values perform the following adjustments in order:

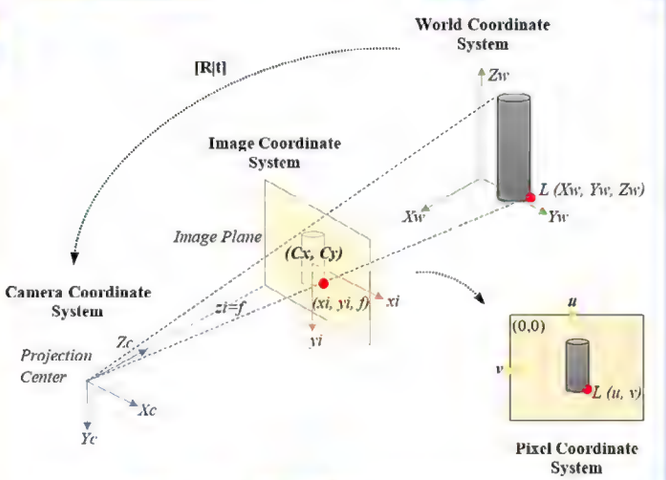
Step 1 – Position the asset in the world via translation, rotation, and scale. Each object in the game world has its own matrix for these coordinates.

Step 2 – Apply the "camera coordinates," positioning the view in 3D space.

Step 3 – Flatten all the geometry visible to the camera to produce the 2D image displayed on the screen.

Aboard the RSP, microcode is executed to perform threads – typically, graphical and audio. These include handling the transformation, scaling, rotation, culling/clipping, lighting calculations, and other 3D matrix math. In short, the RSP is responsible for calculating what should be in 3D space at any given time, although it can also handle audio processing. Depending on how the developers decided to tackle sound requests, both the CPU and the RCP can handle audio processing. The N64 does not have a dedicated sound chip the way previous Nintendo consoles do, so some creativity and thought had to go into assigning that responsibility to one of two chips already busy with other instructions.

Meanwhile, the RDP is responsible for rasterizing (converting to pixels) the results of the RSP, processing draw steps, and managing the frame buffer. These duties include applying textures and filters, mixing colors and transparencies, blending, and Z-buffering. Z-buffering calculations determine how the N64 draws 3D models on the screen more elegantly than simply rendering items in order from most to least distant. It accounts for situations like complex geometry that might simultaneously be occluding part of an object but is occluded by another part of that object (for example, someone jumping a hurdle with a leg on each side of the obstruction). Ordering is a crucial step to get right, as you can short-circuit a lot of work that you don't need to perform if it's not visible in the final version of the frame. Z-buffering is an intensive process for the Nintendo 64, so some developers designed around/without it when attempting to improve the framerate.



Example projection of a 3D object on a 2D image. (Fernandez / Avila / Gonçalves)

One of the glaring limitations of the RDP is how it handles textures. The RDP's on-chip texture memory (TMEM, a cache-like managed memory) is a mere four kilobytes, and its array can only store eight textures simultaneously. This limitation means developers must either settle for muddier, less impressive surfaces in their world space or get creative with how textures are stored and used. This limit is further halved to two kilobytes if mipmapping (procedurally scaling down textures to simulate the blur of objects at greater distances) is enabled, which is why many Nintendo 64 games settled for solids or gradients on their 3D objects rather than textures.

The Nintendo 64 came with 4MB Rambus dynamic read-only (RDRAM) onboard memory and supported an additional 4MB via the Expansion Pak. The memory has both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, it can be transferred extremely quickly, supporting continuous high-speed access at roughly 500 megabytes per second, and can be partitioned by developers as purpose-needed, such as buffers for audio/video or dynamic heaps for storing variable data. Unfortunately, the initial latency to make requests from memory is high, causing many developers to simply leave some assets on the cart rather than relying on loading them into RAM.

As either a consequence or a necessary evil for simultaneously being on the cutting edge of technology and trying to keep the price point down, this combination of poor latency on the main memory and the limitations of the texture memory produced many of the Nintendo 64's performance-related issues for players.

Anti-Piracy:
An upgraded version of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System's CIC chip was added to prevent unauthorized cartridge development for the Nintendo 64. To circumvent this, authentic N64 cartridges carrying the necessary CIC chip can be plugged into a pass-through cartridge slot. This technique allows hardware to push dumped carts into memory but was most commonly used for cheating devices like the Action Replay and GameShark.

The Sharp-brand PIF chipset handles controllers and peripherals, transferring data to and from the RCP via a serial bus. It also manages CIC requests to authenticate legitimate Nintendo carts and manage region locking. The N64 features a bulky metal plating system both atop and beneath its board, functioning as a heatsink to help dissipate the chipsets' temperature; this is because, like many older systems, it does not feature any active cooling from fans.

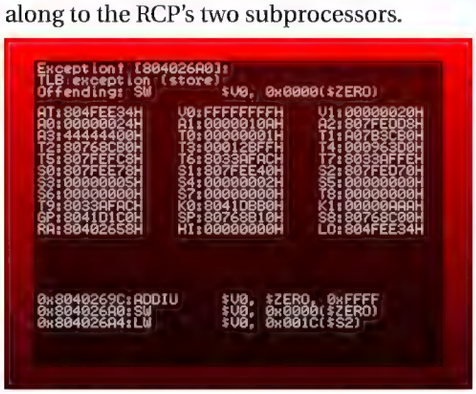
Coding for the N64

N64 games are primarily written in the C or C++ programming languages, though MIPS assembly code can handle microcode and other functions with performance implications. A Makefile (a way to help automate and simplify some of the build processes for a program) specifies certain values, including key directories, the linker and compiler, headers, code objects, and the target ROM file to produce.

Specific regions of RDRAM can be addressed using named, defined segments that can be referenced in the source code by their chosen name.

Threads, defined by the program at launch, are priority ratings for work to be done by the CPU. The system is constantly working with one thread; an idle thread exists for moments when there is no other thread for the console to advance. Passing data can be done between threads or to and from threads and RCP tasks. This exchange is helpful but should not be confused with the multithreading we see today, which takes advantage of multiple cores; the Nintendo 64's threads are a way to manage processes and priorities, not a way for the chipset to execute multiple threads simultaneously.

The RCP also takes instructions from code, defined as lists. Because developers could control both the RSP and RDP, a savvy and experienced development staff could get the most out of the system's complex architecture by writing custom microcode to pass along to the RCP's two subprocessors.



N64 gnu app error handling routine.

Well-designed source code can be the difference between a smooth and sluggish game experience. With the N64's unique architecture and constraints, developers need to be well-versed in what the system's API offers. A documented guide to the functions available in the N64's API is available in the Nintendo 64 Function Reference Manual (a stylish HTML3 website, complete with frames) for developers to refer to as needed. Nintendo also produced several development manuals for working with audio, microcode, the GCC compiler, the 64DD, and more. Silicon Graphics also released documentation, including a command summary for the RDP and a guide to programming for the RSP. Yet more manuals were made by Metrowerks, developers of CodeWarrior, an integrated development environment that could build to many target platforms (of which the N64 was one).

Unfortunately, Nintendo wasn't entirely forthcoming. They didn't release the microcode to make full use of the RCP's programmable nature until later in the system's lifespan, meaning a number of developers created their games with a limited ability to leverage the hardware fully. The consequence was a clear gap between what the most talented development teams could squeeze out of the hardware versus the rest of the community at large, whether that was out of concern for third-party developers not meeting quality standards, having extremely subtle bugs with too much low-level control, not wanting to offer that depth of support, SGI being shy from prior experience, or wanting to give first-party Nintendo games an edge.

Console Revisions and RGB-Modding

Not all Nintendo 64 consoles are identical. Revisions to the hardware came over the years, bringing variations in the chipsets and circuitry. Consequently, no single solution exists for modifying an N64 to capture a digital signal for crisp, clean video output. All N64 consoles are designed to output to either composite or S-Video, using the same multi-out cables of the Super Nintendo that preceded it.

In early NTSC N64s (NUS-CPU-01 to 04), the Digital-to-Analog Converter and the Video Encoder chips are independent. The VDC-NUS takes digital video data from the RCP and outputs RGB, which is consumed by the ENC-NUS chip and encoded into Composite and S-Video. This schema makes the model easy to RGB-mod – simply pull the signal from between these points. Later N64s (NUS-CPU-05 onward) combine the audiovisual DACs and video encoder chips into a single chip, the AVDC-NUS (and later, MAV-NUS). These consoles can still be RGB-modded but require more elaborate solutions.

PAL systems, by contrast, only ever had the audio DAC broken out. Later models combined this partitioned audio chip with the video DAC and video encoder.

Conclusion

The Nintendo 64 arrived in a world taking its first real-time steps along the third dimension and jumped in with both feet. The partnership with industry leader SGI, the decision to opt for cartridges over compact discs, the stock four-controller support, and the uniqueness of the chipset design – these technical decisions all played roles in cementing the legacy of Nintendo's "ultra" system. Whether you look back at the system with fond memories or lament what could have been if things had gone differently, the wellspring of fondness for the N64 and its library is hard to deny. As this guidebook demonstrates, hundreds of developers' lovingly crafted works were shaped in part by the strategic engineering decisions that made Nintendo's 64-bit project a reality.

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Daniel Greenberg (@winterion) is all those cool things he listed in the Writer Bios section, but did you know he's also the first-ever Video Game History Foundation patron? It's never too late to join the ranks of those helping preserve our medium's legacy – visit gamehistory.org to learn more, and tell them Professor Greenberg sent you!

Nintendo 64DD and Randnet

By Danny Bivens

The Nintendo 64 Disk Drive has a complicated history. Unknown to many gamers in the West, the 64DD was an add-on for the Nintendo 64 that expanded the storage capacity for cart-based games. The 64DD also aimed to bring other features to Nintendo's 64-bit console, such as web browsing, content exchange, and other online capabilities. Nintendo had high hopes for the device, and the ideas and concepts were then unique.

Background

The 64DD was announced at Nintendo's Shoshinkai (later SpaceWorld) in 1995 but wasn't revealed to the public in detail until 1996. The 64DD would connect to the Nintendo 64 via the "EXT" connector at the system's bottom. The system used proprietary 3.5-inch disks that were roughly twice as thick as the standard 3.5-inch floppy disks of the time. They held up to 64 MB of data, significantly more than the capacity of Nintendo 64 cartridges (8-12 MB) at the time of the 64DD's launch. To use the 64DD, users had to insert the included 4 MB Expansion Pak, which would enhance the RAM on the base N64 console. The 64DD also featured a real-time clock, online capabilities, and a built-in 36 MB chip that contained integrated font and sound files. This chip would give game creators more leeway in development, as they could devote more of their own available memory to other assets or content.

The 64DD unit.

The N64DD connected to the bottom of a Nintendo 64 console via the EXT port.

While the 64DD couldn't read disks as fast as the base system could read cartridges, the 64DD could read roughly two to three times faster than the CD-ROM drives on the Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation. The transfer rates were substantially higher; N64 cartridges could pass 5 to 50 MB per second, and 64DD disks up to 1 MB per second. By comparison, PlayStation and Saturn disks could only manage 300 kB per second. At a time when loading screens were becoming the norm, quicker loading was a valuable differentiator. In addition, unlike the CD technology it was competing with, the 64DD was a "burst access" machine. In contrast to the CD-ROM format, which could stream data to consoles or computers, the 64DD sent the data to the Nintendo 64 console in high-speed bursts. This limitation was problematic for developers hoping to make use of Full Motion Videos (FMV) or streaming audio in games. However, it wasn't completely prohibitive. Developers could squeeze FMVs into Nintendo 64 carts before the end of its lifecycle through a mixture of compression and pre-loading.

The main fifth-generation video game console physical media (clockwise from top-left): Nintendo 64 cartridge, 64DD disk, Sega Saturn disc, and Sony PlayStation disc.

The 64DD disks gave Nintendo 64 developers access to more readable data and more writable on-disk memory. 38 MB of the 64 MB on the disk could be written to, potentially giving developers more room for games with extensive save data, in-game creations, pictures, and more. Manufacturing cost and time were also less for 64DD disks than traditional N64 cartridges, which could cost as much as $30 or more to produce. While 64DD disks closed the gap on production costs, CD-based games remained the cheapest option, costing as little as a dollar per disk.

There were three different ways to develop a game for the 64DD. First, developers could choose to make a game run exclusively off the Disk Drive. Some advantages to this pattern would be lowering production costs and simply giving the developers more space for their games. Second, it was possible to create a game for the standard Nintendo 64 console and then release an add-on disk with additional content. This add-on model had great potential for titles like sports games, where developers could release a base cartridge and disks in subsequent years with updated content and graphics at a cheaper cost for manufacturing (and potentially to the end user). Multiple titles were in development using this method, including the expansion to *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* called *Ura Zelda* (released later on GameCube as *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Master Quest* in the West) and the *F-Zero X Expansion Kit*, which did see a release. The third option was to develop a game that uses both the 64DD and the Game Boy via the Transfer Pak. The small number of released games used disk-only and add-on options. However, only two titles (both in the Mario Artist series) were released for the 64DD that utilized Game Boy connectivity. There were reportedly a few in development.

F-Zero X Expansion Kit is the only example of a released 64DD expansion title that required the original N64 cartridge in order to play.

A primary focus of the 64DD was Randnet. This online subscription service was proposed to offer a wide range of features, including the ability to surf the internet, create custom avatars, use online message boards, exchange messages between game programmers and producers, play online against other players in Japan, observe other people playing games, participate in beta tests, access digital magazines for various kinds of news, access and listen to music, and shop online. Ultimately, not all of these features were included in the final version of the Randnet service. Limited web browsing, email, online shopping, online bulletin boards, and content sharing via the Mario Artist series were the only features that made the final cut.

Release

Purchasing a 64DD was different from buying other consoles at the time. Gamers were not paying for the system itself but rather the Randnet subscription and all it had to offer. Before the release of Randnet and the 64DD, a registration period was held between November 11, 1999, and January 11, 2000. Up to 100,000 people could register for the service. Nintendo gave no specific reason for the 100,000 number. However, it could have been due to Randnet's technical limitations or simply a marketing tactic. Also noteworthy was that this was being billed as the "initial registration period," with more in the planning stages for a future undecided timeframe.

After numerous delays, the 64DD was finally released in Japan on December 1, 1999. Upon release, the system was available to purchase through a rent-to-own subscription service with two different configurations. For ¥2,500 a month, players would receive the 64DD unit. Another configuration, set at ¥3,300 per month, would offer the 64DD as well as a special black translucent Nintendo 64. Both offered access to the Randnet service and the 64DD Starter Kit, which included the 64DD unit, a modem cartridge, a modular cable, the Expansion Pak, and games that would be delivered every few months. After the initial year was finished, the Randnet service

would be available for ¥1,500 a month, and gamers would be able to keep the hardware. Nintendo also allowed purchasing a 12-month flat-rate plan at local retailers nationwide. ¥30,000 would get you the 64DD Starter Kit, Randnet service, and games. ¥39,600 would get you all of what was offered in the ¥30,000 bundle, plus a translucent black N64 console.

The Randnet Starter Kit package next to the translucent black Nintendo 64 console box.

Nintendo billed Randnet and the 64DD as an affordable way to not only have a new way to play games on Nintendo 64 but also as a way to access the internet affordably. Between the cost of N64 hardware, game prices, and comparisons to fees of internet providers of the time in Japan, Nintendo did raise some valid points. Games at the time on the N64 averaged about ¥5,800 per title, the N64 hardware was ¥14,000, and a modem for a PC typically cost around ¥9,800. Factoring all of this into the equation, Nintendo had a strong argument about the affordability and use case for gamers who wanted to play games and have access to the internet.

Ten titles released for the 64DD between Dec.1999 and Aug. 2000:

Mario Artist: Paint Studio (Dec. 1, 1999)
Doshin the Giant 1 (Dec. 1, 1999)
Randnet Disk (Feb. 23, 2000)
Mario Artist: Talent Studio (Feb. 23, 2000)
SimCity 64 (Feb. 23, 2000)
F-Zero X Expansion Kit (Apr. 21, 2000)
Japan Pro Golf Tour 64 (May 2, 2000)
Doshin the Giant: Tinkling Toddler Liberation Front! Assemble! (May 17, 2000)
Mario Artist: Communication Kit (June 29, 2000)
Mario Artist: Polygon Studio (Aug. 29, 2000)

An assortment of 64DD disks. For full reviews of each 64DD title, please refer to the following section.

Initially, Nintendo planned to send Randnet subscribers 64DD disks bi-monthly. While they more or less held to this, some games saw slight delays, and others were made available at retail. A wide variety of games from numerous companies were in development for the 64DD. Unfortunately for the add-on, the need for the device grew less and less as time passed. Several big-name titles were originally in development for the 64DD, including *Mother 3* (aka *Earthbound 64*), *Seaman*, *Dragon Quest VII*, *Fire Emblem 64*, *Resident Evil 0*, *Mario 64 2*, and many others. These planned titles were either released on cartridge, moved to other platforms, or canceled entirely.

Demise

Several factors led to the ultimate demise of the 64DD and Randnet service. The numerous delays played a part in this. The further away gamers got from the Nintendo 64 release in 1996, the more difficult it was to explain to consumers and publishers alike what benefits the 64DD brought to the table compared to CD-based formats. In an interview with Shigesato Itoi two years before the 64DD launched, Shigeru Miyamoto said, "It would have been easier to understand if the DD was already included when the N64 first came out. It's getting harder to explain that after the fact. (laughs)"

Purchasing the 64DD and Randnet service was likely prohibitive to some. In the marketing before release, Nintendo stated that payments had to be made via credit card. Perhaps after realizing that this limitation would potentially impact sales, they changed their plans to add the ability to make purchases via bank transfer or cash payments. While Nintendo did expand the payment options, those who did not pay via credit card in the early stages of availability would often have to wait weeks or months before they could get their hands on the system. It is important to note that credit cards were used sparingly for smaller purchases throughout Japan at the time. A report comparing retail payments in Japan versus the United States in 2000 revealed that for the United States during that period, on average, people would make about 60 card-based payment transactions per person. In Japan, only four transactions per person per year would be made.

Randnet was the hub for many of the 64DD's online capabilities.

As storage sizes for N64 cartridges increased in the latter part of the system's lifecycle, the 64DD was less relevant than when it was originally conceived. To compound matters, by the time the 64DD was available to the public, next-generation systems like the Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube were out or just around the corner. With sluggish sales and general disinterest in the product, the announcement came in November 2000 that the Randnet service would be discontinued as of February 28, 2001.

The Nintendo 64DD certainly didn't light the world on fire. It won't be remembered by gamers for its great lineup of games and certainly won't be commemorated for being able to deliver on all it set out to do. However, some of the concepts behind the Randnet service, the 64DD, and the games that were being developed for it still live on to this day. Online gaming and services, a few things that Nintendo tried with Randnet and the 64DD, are mainstays of modern gaming today. The current top-selling game of all time in Japan, Animal Crossing: New Horizons on Nintendo Switch, would not have been possible without some of the game concepts that were originally conceived on the 64DD. Nintendo certainly took some risks with their add-on that didn't pay off. However, the 64DD does deserve at least a tiny mention in the annals of gaming.

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Every Game Is Super Mario 64

By Alex Faciane

Shigeru Miyamoto is a scientific sort of game designer who you call a genius even when they're tough to work with because, after all the hand-wringing and heady conceptualizing, the demoralizing and repetitive work crosses a clear threshold. Suddenly, the details are just right, the bizarre list of demands comes into focus, and iteration after iteration, the final product approaches something resembling sheer perfection. As I read more and more interviews with the man and he slowly expanded for me into a full impression of a real person with his own life somewhere else on the planet, his brutal, nuanced, and maddeningly simple process was revealed. In one sense, an idea one day occurs to him. In this instance, that idea was "I really just wanted to see him rendered in three dimensions…I wanted to see little Mario bobbing up and down as he walked" (shmupulations). But, with five or six years of trial and error for everything from physics to control configurations to rules and movements for some of the first dynamic 3D cameras in video games, it is an accumulation of seemingly minor details that elevates Miyamoto's interpretation, *Super Mario 64*, to something so influential, that it is almost indistinguishable from the concept of 3D platforming itself. It was like math, like language, like nothing was invented at all because somehow it had always been there. If you're holding the Ultimate Nintendo 64 guidebook in your hand right now and reading this far in, probably somewhere near the back, I bet you probably know what I mean about how important *Super Mario 64* actually is. Still, just in case you don't, I'm going to briefly quote the words of Rockstar Games' Dan Houser from an interview he did with *The New York Times* in 2012: "Anyone who makes 3-D games who says they've not borrowed something from Mario or Zelda is lying — from the games on Nintendo 64, not necessarily the ones from today." When *Super Mario 64* was released in 1996, based on the reaction of game developers at the time, I don't think it would be going too far to say that it probably felt close to what it would be like if someone invented a new thing called "video games" all over again, from the beginning, and ever since then, developers from all cultures across the world have been trying to respond.

Super Mario 64

An almost clinically perfect attempt at moving 2D platforming to the third dimension.

Super Mario 64 has many faces. *Banjo-Kazooie*, for example, is the lush, meaty, technologically impressive *Super Mario 64*. *Banjo-Kazooie* not only felt vast and open in scope but also pushed the limits of what video games were capable of during the times of colorful, chunky games that felt like theme park rides populated with strange, quirky characters that only made two or three noises when they talked. Like *Donkey Kong 64* or *Rayman 2: The Great Escape*, this was the *Super Mario 64* that everyone in the family could enjoy, and kids could play over and over again like their favorite "Pryde of the X-Men" VHS tape. The first time Western developers saw the hardware and software for what was then known as the Ultra 64 was at the Shoshinkai 1995 trade show in Tokyo, Japan. The developers at Rare saw the bizarrely conceptual level designs and deeply technical controls that gave *Super Mario 64* its lauded high-skill ceiling and scaled back Banjo's movements to make him more predictable and easier to master for less-experienced players. In contrast to *Mario 64*'s visual simplicity, Rare opted for something more dense and luxurious, with large-scale twisting stage geometry and thick slabs of their trademark cartoon-like art direction and humor. It's excessive, it's comforting, it's reliable, and over the years, these games and others like them are often mistaken for the original gold standard itself. Look for them at the top of best-of lists, but if you're looking for Conker, he's through the beaded curtain in the back.

Banjo-Kazooie

A Vegas-style buffet of luxurious showpiece add-ons to *Super Mario 64*'s solid base.

Elsewhere, thanks to high-pitched faux-Italian screaming of Charles Martinet and its face-contorting title screen, games like *Earthworm Jim 64* became the version of *Super Mario 64* that jump-started the second wave of flash-in-the-pan games. These were based more on how plucky or pop culture-savvy their mascot was rather than things like an exquisite presentation or highly calibrated gameplay. In the same way, *Super Mario World* on the Super NES begat bizarre efforts from *Cool Spot* to *Lester the Unlikely*, and we have plenty of evidence that *Super Mario 64*'s success led directly to *Tonic Trouble*, *Rocket: Robot on Wheels*, all the Disney/Warner Bros. licensed titles, and most other games featuring characters with huge teeth and big plumpy eyeballs. In 1997, *Gex 64*'s Jeff Zwelling told Tommy Tallarico on the television show *Electric Playground* that "There are pieces of Gex that are related to Mario." To their credit, this did not extend merely to looks. *Super Mario 64*'s fully 3D world also inspired Crystal Dynamics to throw out the old Sony tools they used to make the first *Gex* and build their own from scratch. And yet, like many other mascots, Gex never quite reached Mario's heights. In *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, Dan Hsu said that "if this game had Banjo's or Mario's controls and camera, the game would be fantastic" (EGM 111. p 257), but they, along with other outlets, generally agreed that it was quite a fun game at the time, nonetheless. There are several days throughout the year when games like these would bring great joy to your waiting cartridge slot, but they are elusive, like truffle season, and the mood you're in when you want to play one is impossible to describe. They don't really work. It's tough to enjoy these characters beyond the odd chuckle, yet there they all are. None of it makes any sense. Why are there two N64 Gex platforming games? That didn't even happen for Mario!

Gex 64: Enter the Gecko

For better or worse, mix edgy Generation X 90's attitude with N64's killer app, and this is what pops out of the oven.

When you think of Mario's legacy and how it's possible for *Super Mario 64* to be simultaneously so faithful and so strangely divergent from the separately iconic 2D games it sprang from, one is reminded of the inexplicable *Bomberman Hero*. It's exciting and confusing simultaneously, like the surprise result of some poorly written online quiz. The basic design for the game grew from the abandoned remains of a Bonk title that Hudson Soft canceled after struggling with the lofty standard set by *Super Mario 64* in the 3D transition, clumsily smashing the Bomberman IP against the formula for the first act of the original Star Wars in a matchup as wild as a combination of a KFC/Taco Bell location. It served up a wacky hit title that feels simultaneously like an afterthought and a passion project. It's not clear to me who this is for, but I have to believe something so strangely specific exists for a good reason. Maybe a brave software developer in a *Singin' in the Rain*-style bind once saw a vision of a single-player 3D Bomberman in the reflection of the water of Dire, Dire Docks. At HAL Laboratory, Kirby inhaled Lakitu

and absorbed his considerable cinematographic talents (*Kirby 64*). At Konami, werewolves and vampire killers rose from the dead and stumbled up Tick Tock Clock (*Castlevania*), and Goemon haunted the tiny and claustrophobic rooms of King Boo's mansion, searching violently for both the Peach Mountain Shoguns and creative inspiration (*Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon*). Someone somewhere loved making every little bit of these games, such fresh and flavorful twists on the originals, blindly leaping along with their beloved intellectual property into this complex, uncharted, and spatially immersive territory without fear or hesitation. (Also, separately from this nonsense, *Bomberman Hero* secretly has the best soundtrack on Nintendo 64! Good luck finding a legal way to hear it!)

Bomberman Hero

Following in Mario's franchise-revitalizing footsteps, 1980s and 1990s 8-bit heroes popped out of the woodwork with all kinds of lofty dreams.

Then, for those *Super Mario 64* players that had more fun in Princess Peach's Castle than inside the paintings, stretching the jumping physics to their absolute limit to see how high up the level geometry they can get that chubby little dude to go, forever trying to exceed *Mario 64*'s relatively conventional design constraints, there are games like *Glover*. *Glover*, a game where you play as a giant four-fingered sentient Toontown glove, is delicious nonsense to slam into your eyeballs when, for whatever reason, you're not really in your right mind. Games like these don't seem normal or graspable to us, yet, from a mad scientist's point of view, they suddenly are. Interactive Studios thought they were really making something special and revolutionary until they saw the splendor of *Super Mario 64* in action, which effortlessly surpassed them in both size and scope without any of the same programming issues they were struggling with. Suddenly, it felt like somebody had moved the goalposts ten thousand yards away into another stadium entirely. So, instead of trying to beat Mario at his own game, Glover is shaped like a hand, and he grabs stuff and bounces balls to get around. 3D platforming concepts grew more and more obtuse. In *Chameleon Twist*, you manipulate a chameleon's exceptionally long and sticky reptile tongue to kill, jump, and fly all the way back home. A desire to be novel extends along into joyous surrealist cyber-horror. In *Space Station Silicon Valley*, you're a microchip that jumps like a parasite from animal to animal, possessing them like a digital virus and using their various ungainly bodies to traverse hostile alien environments. Today, the *Glover* developers will freely admit that *Super Mario 64* is the superior game, but that's not really the point. Miyamoto's new way of thinking and the new bar of quality he set made all games, even weird, imperfect, niche ones, more interesting and inventive, and sometimes, that's more important than being "good."

Glover

Some could create games on the level of Shigeru Miyamoto, and some… didn't reach quite as wide of an audience.

Okay, with only 34 or so titles that qualify as Nintendo 64 platformers, that's about as far as I can stretch this. However, while I wrote this, I played a lot of games you probably hadn't heard of until you saw them in this book. And though it's a little cheeky, and not even the reviewer in this very book agrees with me, I want to say that *Blues Brothers 2000* is a surprisingly decent video game. It's not perfect; it's nowhere near a masterpiece, and its soundtrack sounds like it's from a kid's creativity software suite that came pre-installed on a Compaq Presario. Still, it, too, is *Super Mario 64* as much as any of these games is, and for whatever reason, it spoke to me. Maybe someone out there liked the same parts of *Super Mario 64* I did and tried to make a game out of it. Maybe ever since *Super Mario 64* came out, everyone's been making *Super Mario 64*.

Yuji Naka is the creator of Mario's historic rival, Sonic the Hedgehog. When it comes to making *Super Mario 64*s, he believes success comes from trying to match the leader's quality rather than beating them at what they're already doing. In a 2001 *Famitsu* interview, he said, "If you try to make the exact same thing, you'll never win; you've got to pursue a different path." He could have been talking about Sonic or any of these other N64 platformers I've mentioned interchangeably. Or maybe he was just talking about every game since *Super Mario 64* was released. Even a game so fundamentally different as the PlayStation 2 RPG *Kingdom Hearts* was rooted in director Tetsuya Nomura's feeling that only Disney characters could compete with something as grand as *Super Mario 64*. And now, far in the future, maybe 3D games have finally evolved, or maybe that latest open-world masterpiece is just a giant *Super Mario 64* with an inventory. However, no matter what, we are still very much living in the shockwaves rippling out from when these glorious explosions rocked and reformed their prospective worlds in their own image. With Mario's modern offerings still rating among the top video games being made today, it seems like we have yet to arrive at the small, less frequent ripples. Maybe we are still twirling in the air in our little bright blue overalls after rolling off the top of that first enormous curve, getting our minds blown.

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Alex Faciane is a funny video game expert from Los Angeles who's been writing articles, making videos, and recording podcasts for over a decade. He currently hosts the Super Beard Bros YouTube Channel and the Chilluminati Podcast, and he wrote the script for Wunderling DX, which is available on Nintendo Switch, PS4, Xbox One, and PC. He's very cool, loves his burgers, and spends most of his time hiding in his house reading comic books.

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Console of 1,000 Holds: The History of N64 Wrestling Games

By Audi Sorlie

By the mid-1990s, the celebrated sport of wrestling had found itself at a crossroads of development between the theatrical mayhem of American "sports entertainment" as coined by the WWF and the respected display of athleticism and skill in Japanese professional wrestling. This development played out on television and live events across the two great nations and in the virtual arena of video games. The schtick was up in North America, and the popularity had plummeted from overtly nonsensical characters and stories. In comparison, in Japan, many of the greatest grapplers of all time were wreaking havoc in stadiums and halls. With this contrast, the 16-bit wrestling experience had a significant deviation between the approach of a Japanese developer and that of American developers.

In North America, wrestling games were mostly showmanship with very little substance. They focused on recognizable faces and voice samples rather than honing the interactive experience and tailoring it towards anything more profound than a slugfest. Examples could be seen in Sculptured Software's 16-bit WWF series (*WWF Super Wrestlemania*, *WWF Royal Rumble*, *WWF Raw*) or the Beam Software-developed *WCW SuperBrawl Wrestling*. In Japan, companies such as HUMAN and Natsume focused on deeper gameplay and larger movesets for their Fire Pro Wrestling and All Japan Pro Wrestling series, respectively, growing ever closer to translating the actual sport into a fully simulated interactive experience. Varie, a Japanese developer with ties to Capcom, would focus their efforts on New Japan Pro Wrestling's licensed roster and bring an unseen amount of detail to the actual wrestlers and their mannerisms in the ring. Even smaller independent organizations such as FMW would find themselves playable on the Super Famicom, though in a highly experimental 2D fighting game based on the ideas of head honcho Onita Atsushi. In all, nearly 70 different pro wrestling titles were released during the 16-bit generation, ranging from visual novel titles to fully polygonal graphical efforts towards the end of that console cycle. In Japan, wrestling games couldn't be more red hot. However, game sales stagnated overseas, and new industry blood was desperately needed.

WWF Super Wrestlemania (multiplatform, 1992)

Super Fire Pro Wrestling X Premium (Super Famicom, 1996)

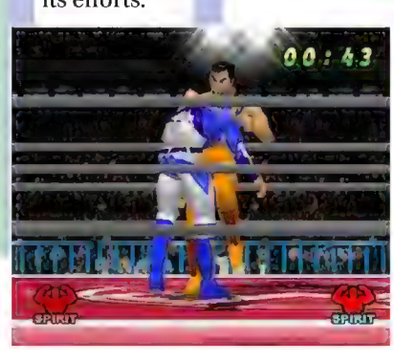
As the 32-bit systems gained more traction, wrestling would soon evolve and follow suit. North America would see the button-bashing arcade experiences of *WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game* and its horrendous sequel, *WWF In Your House* released. However, the 1995 WWF television product was as stale as these game efforts and faced stiff competition from *Nitro*, the Monday-night flagship program from Ted Turner's southern WCW organization. In Japan, media house Yuke's had slowly begun experimenting with a 3D wrestling game engine for the PlayStation, resulting in *Shin Nippon [New Japan] Pro Wrestling Toukon Retsuden*. This title aimed to bridge the accessibility of new fighting experiences such as *TEKKEN* and *Battle Arena Toshinden* with pro wrestling. However, in certain corners of HUMAN's development house, young programmers were frustrated with HUMAN's reluctance to adopt 3D gaming fully. These programmers jumped ship and formed an entirely new group, The Man Breeze, specifically focusing on developing wrestling video games and evolving the genre from its rocky 3D efforts.

WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game (multiplatform, 1995)

Shin Nippon Pro Wrestling Toukon Retsuden (PlayStation, 1995)

The Man Breeze began to develop an engine that would encompass the ideas that the other companies had rejected. The AI would be sensible, thinking offensively while also building momentum and storytelling, referred to as "ring psychology" in professional wrestling. The movesets would be expanded, combining slight timing aspects from the Fire Pro series and fusing them with 3D space sensibilities to embrace the new 3rd dimension of gameplay fully. The result on PlayStation was *Virtual Pro Wrestling*, a 32-bit wrestling revolution, including qualities such as a dynamic camera system, body-specific damage parameters, and frame-by-frame animated impact frames. *Virtual Pro Wrestling* gameplay allowed for far more dynamic matches than any competitors. However, Japanese wrestling had increasingly consolidated towards the two major factions: All Japan Pro Wrestling and New Japan Pro Wrestling. The Man Breeze soon found itself without a viable license to continue the franchise.

In North America, wrestling game development had slowed considerably due to WWF's waning popularity. WCW was eager to find new merchandising deals as their product grew momentum. WCW's merchandising would never quite find its footing. However, it would be disastrous for live gate numbers, though video games could be a blessing with a potential publisher free to seek out more out-of-the-box ideas. As THQ found itself the victor in the bidding for WCW's rights on home consoles, the search began for who could bring these potential games to fruition. Activision had landed a deal with Yuke's, publishing *Toukon Retsuden* as *Power Move Pro Wrestling* in North America. However, friendly advice led THQ to discover The Man Breeze toying away at their new wrestling engine in Japan. Impressed by what they saw, with additional funding and a license in tow, The Man Breeze quickly adapted *Virtual Pro Wrestling* into *WCW vs. the World*. The recognizable names of WCW's stacked roster were perfectly mixed with the great variety of moves and presentation since WCW highly promoted worldwide wrestling with its cruiserweights and heavyweight megastars. The war for wrestling supremacy was now fully heated on television and in the video game space as THQ funded a follow-up while WWF sought to legitimize its efforts.

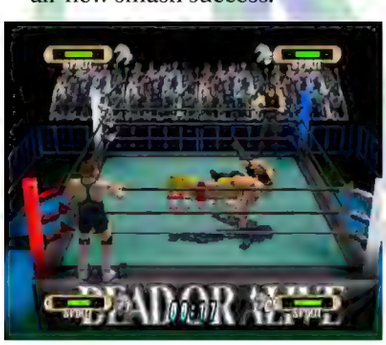


Virtual Pro Wrestling (PlayStation, 1996)

WCW vs. the World (PlayStation, 1997)

In Sept. 1996, the Nintendo 64 was released in North America, promising the most powerful 3D gaming available and an instantly multiplayer experience with four built-in controller ports promoting co-op play or even battle royales. The Man Breeze, now with additional funding from Asmik Ace in Japan, reformed itself under the banner AKI and began developing the proposed successor to *WCW vs. the World*. Tackling the Nintendo 64 with early access via their ties to Asmik Ace, the developers found the machine to be the perfect fit, requesting development focused on the 64-bit console to maximize development, a request happily granted by the publisher THQ. The resulting *WCW vs. nWo: World Tour* would be a masterclass in wrestling gaming mayhem. The new refined controls, an instantly accessible world-class roster of wrestlers, and a vast array of maneuvers and mannerisms gave the game an authenticity unlike anything before it, without compromising in action or fun, even for those who did not engage in the sport. The Japanese counterpart, *Virtual Pro Wrestling*, would include both WCW and Japanese wrestlers. For many, *WCW vs. nWo World Tour* would be the de facto multiplayer experience of 1997, and sales would even rival those of *Mario Kart 64* as its popularity grew. THQ was thrilled to have a hit on their hand and see their fortune change after years of producing licensed video game stinkers. THQ quickly commissioned a follow-up. Even WCW, having been slightly hesitant to involve themselves deeply, allowed AKI unprecedented access to their production crew and wrestlers for the follow-up.

Meanwhile, WWF's long-time partner Acclaim revamped their efforts by seeking talent from sports video game experts such as EA and restructuring Sculptured Software. It began producing *WWF War Zone* in close partnership with the newly formed Iguana West. *WWF War Zone* was released in June 1998. In stark contrast to AKI's systematic approach, *War Zone* was a bombastic continuation of what had come before it, a heavily produced wrestling video game focusing on the show aspect, with the wrestling gameplay leaving a lot to be desired. Taking cues from fighting games to deepen the gameplay, *War Zone* was a slower, more cumbersome in-ring experience, though notably with a lot of finesse and pizazz in terms of presentation with newly recorded voice samples, audio commentary, and an interactive crowd. Despite moderate success, WWF could not catch up to WCW in-ring or on consoles. Towards the end of 1998, *War Zone* would quickly be overshadowed by an all-new smash success.



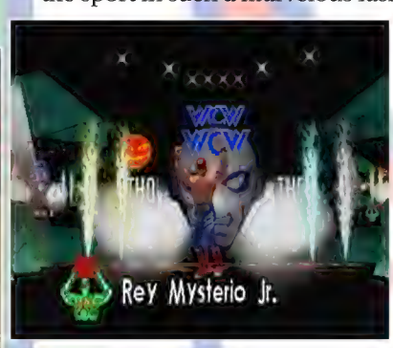
WCW vs. the World
(N64, 1996)

WWF War Zone
(multiplatform, 1998)

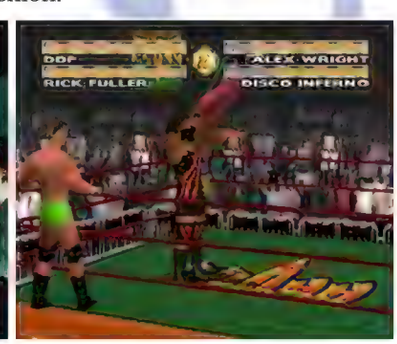
Over in Japan, Yuke's had continued their work on PlayStation's *New Japan's Toukon Retsuden*. They saw fit to move the successful franchise over to the Nintendo 64 as it was quickly emerging as the new hot ticket for wrestling video game action. Rushing out of the gate in early 1998 Hudson's assistance was *New Japan Pro-Wrestling: Toukon Road – Brave Spirits*. The momentum-based wrestling game saw a somewhat unfortunate landing on the console in the wake of *Virtual Pro Wrestling 64* since it offered little in the way of ring innovation and lacked much of the spectacle that had given the PlayStation games such authenticity. *Brave Spirits* played similarly to *Toukon Retsuden*, but the N64 controller's changed button layout made for a rather clunky control scheme. This regression and focus more on combo button sequences resulted in Yuke's receiving disappointing reactions from critics and sales. Releasing at the end of 1998, *New Japan Pro-Wrestling: Toukon Road 2 – The Next Generation* sought to remedy the lackluster response with a higher-budgeted update. *The Next Generation* featured some of Nintendo 64's best sound and motion capture. However, it sadly increased its focus on the combo-based system due to New Japan's increasing involvement with mixed martial arts. With two games down and little in the way to show for it, Hudson moved away from the franchise, leaving Yuke's to continue on the PlayStation hardware to improve their engine.

Hudson was not the only Japanese name trying its hands on the ever-growing wrestling market on the Nintendo 64. Legendary publisher Konami had long wanted to develop their brand of wrestling video game since the Super Famicom and experimented with the idea of an adventure experience based on wrestling combat. The wrestling angle was downplayed in the final product, but it would find a release on the Nintendo 64 in 1999 as *Hybrid Heaven*. Konami would continue to toy with the idea of wrestling for many years before settling on the erotic take on the sport many years later with the PS2's *Rumble Roses* (2004).

AKI left no room for these competitors to stumble, as 1998 would properly come to a close with their much-anticipated sequel, *WCW/nWo Revenge*. *Revenge* boasted vastly improved graphics with digitized wrestler faces, factions spanning the entirety of WCW and nWo television, wrestlers masquerading with known unlicensed movesets from world-famous talent, life-like arenas, and all-new moves. *WCW/nWo Revenge* quickly found itself in the hands of millions worldwide within mere months and became one of the hottest sequels of all time, let alone one of the greatest wrestling games ever produced. It perfectly translated one of the greatest wrestling rosters ever conceived in a video game and had dynamic cruiserweight action. And the "flair" and spectacle of finishing maneuvers looked better than ever with slow-motion post-match recaps (though Ric Flair himself is missing due to company disputes). Even ring entrances, sans actual theme music, were on display as Hollywood Hogan would strut his guitar or La Parka rock out on his chair. *Revenge* was a showpiece, and pro wrestling was hotter than ever, thanks to the big boys on TV and the games introducing fans to the sport in such a marvelous fashion.



WCW/nWo Revenge
(N64, 1998)



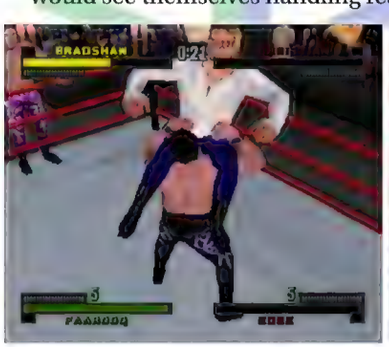
WCW Nitro
(multiplatform, 1998)

But not so marvelous was the other end of WCW's game efforts. With AKI solely focused on the Nintendo 64, THQ, at the behest of WCW, also commissioned a wrestling game for the PlayStation to be produced. *WCW Nitro* was first released on PlayStation in 1997 via Chicago-based Inland Productions before hastily being ported to Nintendo 64 in early 1999 to capitalize on the success of *Revenge*. Unlike AKI's rather sophisticated slobberknocker, *WCW Nitro* was a nearly unplayable mess, requiring exact button combinations and exhibiting near nonexistent hit detection to illustrate its in-ring action. Worse yet, the bespoke FMV sequences filmed especially for the game could not fit on the N64 cartridge, though it did have an increased roster size thanks to borrowing talent from the PlayStation sequel, *WCW/nWo Thunder*. Despite this, WCW's marketing felt the franchise was safer with an American developer rather than sourcing

development in Japan. AKI and THQ found themselves in creative differences with WCW as even the television product was showing signs of fatigue and nonsensical direction.

In 1999, Acclaim again restructured, and Iguana West became Acclaim Studios Salt Lake City, tasked to follow up *WWF War Zone*. Over the past year or so, WWF had "grown up" and gotten itself an attitude adjustment, leaning heavier on sex, violence, and edginess, formerly more associated with smaller wrestling companies such as FMW and ECW. As a result, *WWF Attitude* would focus even more on the "attitudes" of the wrestlers, cussing and fuzzing around as they take to the ring and insult each other or find themselves insulted by the rowdy crowds. Far more insulting, however, was the gameplay, which by now had taken the form of a literal move list of ever-increasingly tricky instructions and limited time windows to execute, as well as stilted animation and a confusing stamina system. But despite the setback in gameplay, *WWF Attitude* would bring to the N64 perhaps the most revered aspect of wrestling video games, then as now, the Create-A-Wrestler option. Within a limited set of body types, layering, coloring, and shaping, creating a custom pro wrestler was possible. And with enough creativity, nearly any wrestler, celebrity, or real-life person could be recreated with unprecedented accuracy. However, despite the popularity of the feature and respectable sales, WWF had grown tired of middling game success and poor response from fans. WWF sought new partners, and as the most prominent developer in the field, AKI via publisher THQ, had just become the hottest free agent on the scene.

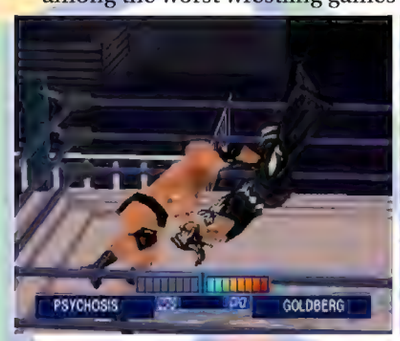
AKI had begun experimenting with their engine and seeking a potential Japanese partner as THQ deliberated with WWF's merchandising department. Asmik Ace, AKI's benefactor on native soil, had begun negotiations for a possible deal with All Japan Pro Wrestling to facilitate legitimacy in that specific market. But in the end, WWF's licensing agreement went through, and the next installment would yet again be based on the hottest property in sports entertainment, as WWF's fortunes had taken a massive upswing thanks to faces like "Stone Cold" Steve Austin and The Rock. The result would be *WWF Wrestlemania 2000*, AKI's greatly anticipated follow-up to *Revenge*. *Wrestlemania 2000* was more a stepping stone than a full-on update, with an increased roster and more extensive moveset. Although noticeably absent were presentation elements that previous WWF titles had seen as standard. The roster also felt considerably less varied from earlier installments due to a lack of cruiserweights, which, combined with the out-of-character game modes and lack of theatrics, led to what could be seen as a more subdued WWF experience. However, this game answered fans' prayers and *2000* sales were among the top for Nintendo 64 that year. AKI would continue their work as Asmik Ace finally struck a deal with All Japan Pro Wrestling, meaning for the very first time, AKI would see themselves handling real-life Japanese wrestling talent.



WWF Attitude
(multiplatform, 1999)

WWF Wrestlemania 2000
(N64, 1999)

With their newfound "vision" for what game development and licensing should entail for their brand, WCW sought out the biggest name in sports game development for their next title. WCW was hot on television when they signed with Electronic Arts, though things had changed by the time of development. An endless cycle of management changes, creative shifts, and questionable booking decisions had led the Atlanta-based wrestling company toward troubled times. For *WCW Mayhem*, a game requiring unprecedented cooperation between the two juggernauts, things were quickly looking grim. EA had little experience with wrestling and struggled to develop a robust engine that could match the honed craftsmanship of developers such as Yuke's and AKI. Other problems arose. The scanning technology used for the game's graphics proved challenging to implement with the wrestlers always on the road. A new voice-generated name system was in heavy research, becoming one of its most touted features, only to be absent in the final product. As a result of mediocre gameplay, the developers were told to emphasize the hardcore aspect of wrestling, generating numerous backstage areas to battle in despite the lack of recognizable locations or situations from television. But perhaps no decision was more peculiar than the "Pay-per-View" mode, a feature inspired by the Mortal Kombat series. It employed numeric codes shown on television and merchandise for WCW that replicated the match card of real-life events. The problem? WCW restructured its roster shortly before *Mayhem*'s release, leading to a noticeably out-of-date roster even before hitting store shelves. This led to impossible matchups as talent had either been added to or removed from the company. Despite this, three numeric codes were released, including one for the new pay-per-view event titled "WCW Mayhem," which was created to promote the video game. EA had come out stumbling, much like the infamous debut of The Shockmaster, and sales and response proved to be negative. Undeterred, WCW put in motion a new game that would become among the worst wrestling games of all time.



WCW Mayhem
(multiplatform, 1999)

ECW Hardcore Revolution
(multiplatform, 2000)

With all the heat on the Monday Night Wars leading WWF and WCW into bitter virtual conflict, Acclaim had seen their fortunes dwindle. It sought new partners as their Salt Lake studio, one specifically made for wrestling video games, wanted to continue their own line of rasslin' entertainment. In the suburbs of Philadelphia, the renegade outfit Extreme Championship Wrestling had attempted to break out and find its place in the mainstream, with WWF and WCW poaching talent and creative ideas. With a fledging show on American airwaves via TNN, Acclaim and ECW allied to create the first M-rated wrestling video game. Its potential success could change the fortunes of Acclaim and ECW itself, which was seeing piling debt. *ECW Hardcore Revolution* (Feb. 2000) would layer the *WWF Attitude* engine in blood. Most features and game modes transitioned to this new iteration, emphasizing hardcore elements such as fire and barbwire. Unfortunately, it also retained the increasingly archaic and non-intuitive gameplay that had sunk *Attitude* before. With little to no visual upgrade to speak of, *Hardcore Revolution* was criticized as a mere reskin of an already existing game rather than a break-out independent wrestling experience. Despite all efforts and good intentions, ECW's time was not long for the world of wrestling or video games.

In Japan, AKI finally revealed their new title at Spaceworld via a direct invitation from Nintendo. They had become one of the top-selling developers overseas and now had a greatly anticipated Japanese-based wrestling game on their hands. *Virtual Pro Wrestling*

2: Ōdō Keishō would feature a robust roster of All Japan Pro Wrestling talent such as Misawa Mitsuharu, Kobashi Kenta, Big Van Vader, and Akiyama Jun, as well as an "unlicensed" roster of over 100 recognizable wrestlers, easily editable via the expanded CAW system to enable virtually a complete Japanese wrestling industry roster. As pro wrestling had incorporated mixed martial arts influences with companies such as K-1 and Pride emerging in the Japanese sports scene, a new highly intuitive striking and ground 'n' pound system was also implemented. This quality made *Virtual Pro Wrestling 2* not just a wrestling video game but a near-complete combat sports simulator, all with some of the most authentic-looking and sounding arenas and ring introductions thus far in wrestling video games. Fortunately, *VPW2*'s modified *Wrestlemania 2000* engine included many features planned or cut for that particular game due to creative differences or time. In *VPW2*, the increased range of moves combined with the more robust Create-A-Wrestler system led the game to quickly become what many believe to be the magnum opus of wrestling video games. But for the many innovations that *VPW2* brought, WWF and THQ were steering the ship in other directions and leading to one final dance on the Nintendo 64, though before then, WCW had one last plan up its sleeve.

Seeing a near-disastrous response to their first efforts together, EA needed help handling the hot potato that WCW had become in such a short time, with requests and demands ever-increasing with development times growing shorter and shorter. WCW felt that the issue with their wrestling video game conundrum was not the lackluster gameplay or limited development scope – the wrestling itself was the issue. It was somehow decided that what would bring WCW back on the gaming map was to take wrestling out of the ring. In *WCW Backstage Assault*, an impressively sized roster saw themselves pitted in highly interactive backstage areas such as parking lots, bathrooms, and concession stands in what could be one of the worst wrestling video games of all time. All fundamental gameplay elements and mechanics were based on the ability to circle, bounce off ring ropes, or climb the turnbuckles. However, these elements were now married to trash cans, toilets, and litter. The backlash was immediate, as even the previews from magazines and fans alike rejected the idea of removing the wrestling ring from a wrestling game. *WCW Backstage Assault* crashed and burned, tarnishing the reputation of World Championship Wrestling even further as the company plummeted into complete despair.

WCW Backstage Assault
(multiplatform, 2000)

WWF No Mercy
(N64, 2000)

At AKI, issues were present as well. THQ and WWF, seeing the success of AKI's efforts on the Nintendo 64, had also eyed the much larger PlayStation market, hoping to satisfy consumers on that side of console wars. Despite AKI's willingness, THQ struck a partnership with Yuke's, AKI's main competitor on the Japanese market, and often regarded as a lesser developer, even though AKI was now seemingly featured more prominently in marketing and store shelf space. AKI was in the midst of development on their next WWF N64 installment, the now legendary *WWF No Mercy*, a title that would be so well-received that Nintendo themselves would feature it in their official marketing for the 2000 holiday season.

For *No Mercy*, much had been changed to accommodate WWF's sports entertainment and presentation style, leading to one of N64's most visually engaging and authentic sports endeavors. Now, players could engage in ladder matches, brawl backstage with destructible environments and objects such as tables, participate in branching storylines, create their own detailed wrestling characters, and even play referee. Nintendo had even allowed for the use of the Transfer Pak with a planned Natsume-developed Game Boy Color version of the game, though AKI saw no definite idea how to implement it, and the idea was scrapped. *No Mercy*'s success was immediate, and the WWF could seemingly do no wrong with this combination of havoc and focus that AKI would provide.

WWF No Mercy would come to cap off AKI's incredible journey of wrestling video games that, within only one console generation, had wholly revolutionized the genre, leading to some of Nintendo 64's greatest success stories. An era had seen the very best of wrestling games as well as the very worst of them. But despite this legacy, AKI saw themselves increasingly frustrated with the demands from its publisher and partner, THQ, who requested further development on the Nintendo 64 rather than moving towards newer hardware such as the PlayStation 2. As a result, what would have been the final send-off for the system, *WWF Backlash*, was canceled. AKI would find themselves left out as THQ gravitated towards their Yuke's relationship, which included a lower production cost and faster delivery. These potential benefits seemingly overshadowed the success that AKI brought.

The simplicity of wrestling on the surface, combined with the instantly accessible gameplay from developers such as AKI, allowed instant fun, either in simple slugfests or sophisticated rivalries built and climaxed with the perfect finishing maneuver. Much like *Super Mario Kart* simplified the concept of racing and handling, *WCW/nWo Revenge* and the like simplified the concept of in-ring combat, inviting the masses to enjoy a rumble with a low cost of entry in terms of learning curves and execution. The successful formula of AKI's engine, in particular, expanded the popularity of pro wrestling beyond its hardcore fanbases, allowing many to overlook their preconceived notions of what wrestling was, instead looking at what wrestling had become in video game form. The popularity of AKI's titles was such that as new wrestling games would be released, nearly all of them would be compared to the timeless gameplay of *WWF No Mercy* and *Virtual Pro Wrestling 2*. Many more modern games would even attempt to emulate their gameplay systems. In 2020, All Elite Wrestling even went so far as to hire the original *No Mercy* director, Hideyuki Iwashita. *AEW Fight Forever* would be released on modern platforms in June 2023, continuing the legacy of the N64 wrestling experience.

In some ways, the story of wrestling games on the Nintendo 64 is filled with as many twists and turns as the television shows they were based on, with developers jumping ship, factions building, and surprise team-ups blossoming from heated rivalries. The games themselves reflect a time in which wrestling peaked for many, filled with the greatest stars of all time and representing a time in their teenage adolescence that made every day as exciting as Monday night on the TNT or USA networks. To this day, fans modify and retexturize the games, breathing new life into the decades-old engines as the gameplay remains timeless, and emulation allows for incredible creativity. All within one single console generation, the Nintendo 64 forever changed the face of wrestling: as a genre, as a sport, as a product, and as a video game.

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Audi Sorlie is a game producer for Limited Run Games and a gaming historian with a heavy focus on the weird world of wrestling video games and obscure Japanese PC98 software. He has authored several books on subjects such as Hong Kong action, video game music, and development personalities. These days, he is active in various retro game communities and also produces documentaries for Digital Foundry.

Multiplayer Madness: Ranking the Best N64 Multiplayer Games

By Dale Kulas

Until the Nintendo 64, the last video game console with four built-in controller ports was the ill-fated Atari 5200 in 1982. From then on, systems like the NES, SNES, and Genesis offered multiplayer for more than two players with either adaptors or special cartridges with extra ports built inside them. Four-player games were mainly reserved for sports and racing games on those platforms. However, the Nintendo 64 console launched with compatibility built-in for four controllers, which paved the way for countless N64 multiplayer classics across numerous genres over the next several years.

Shigeru Miyamoto justified implementing four controller ports as a system design feature in the February 1996 issue of *Next Generation* by stating how it was the first Nintendo system powerful enough to handle four-player split-screen gaming without major performance issues. Miyamoto may have been foreshadowing the N64's legacy shortly before its launch since having four built-in controller ports was the catalyst for the N64 becoming one of the best local-party multiplayer consoles ever. In the past few years, I have been to multiple arcade bars that have the N64 as the only console hooked up to a projector amongst dozens of arcade cabinets, with four controllers and a stack of acclaimed four-player games by its side. Split-screen multiplayer was around for quite some time, and the SNES saw many games have two-player support for this feature, like *Super Mario Kart*. Even a couple of SNES titles attempted four-player split-screen compatibility, like *Street Racer* and *Top Gear 3000*, but it was on the N64 that this feature exploded in popularity. A game does not require split-screen multiplayer to have great co-op, competitive multiplayer, or even support up to four players, as you will soon see. Whether you are an N64 veteran looking for a refresher of the library or a new N64 fan looking for some multiplayer recommendations, I have crafted this feature as your resource for which multiplayer games to turn to for your next N64 game night.

Thank You for Participating Ribbon

It is a considerable feat that Nintendo and Mass Media pulled off cramming all the single-player missions from the acclaimed PC real-time-strategy hit, *Starcraft*, and its expansion, *Brood War*, into the *Starcraft 64* cartridge. They made a lot of audio and visual cutbacks to make it happen, and the single-player gameplay is surprisingly good, considering the sacrifices made! The fact that Mass Media included a two-player split-screen option is a commendable effort, regardless of how much the N64 chugs to keep the action moving during this Expansion Pak-exclusive mode. The only way multiplayer ran somewhat passably was in one-on-one versus battles, but that was essentially pointless due to the inevitable urge to peek at your opponent's screen, which resulted in many furious console resets in matches against my brother.

Mass Media had the daunting task of working split-screen multiplayer into *Starcraft 64*. The fact that it sort of functions in one-on-one matches alone is a development feat and a half (unless you desire laughs, do not attempt to add in extra CPU foes)!

The only reasonable way to play *Starcraft 64* multiplayer is by teaming up against a computer. Unfortunately, as the unit count mounts as the game progresses, it becomes painfully noticeable that the N64 can barely muster up the energy to keep up with severe framerate drops. However, it gets worse. For as bad as the framerate plummets in multiplayer matches involving two players and one computer, for some reason, Mass Media added support for two players to team up against up to four AI opponents. Trying to finish a match with those parameters is the ultimate test of grit for any N64 player. I will give credit where credit is due to Mass Media for putting in all that work to include multiplayer. No matter the performance hit, constructing those additional pylons was all worth it. Well, actually, no, no, it was not.

Bronze Tier

Games featuring story-based co-op were less standard on the N64 than on other consoles. Not many noteworthy games featured the ability to team up for the entire adventure. *Fighting Force 64* is the only worthwhile 3D brawler/beat 'em up, and it carries on the genre's tried-and-true trope of having the option to team up against waves of baddies with a friend. *Duke Nukem 64* has two Dukes team up in the sanitized port of the iconic PC title. *Gauntlet Legends* is a four-player action-RPG that keeps the same nonstop action of the originals and provides hours of mindless hack 'n slash endeavors with buddies. Or perhaps you want to obliterate alien bugs with a pal. In that case, *Armorines: Project S.W.A.R.M.* is available.

The trilogy of Tony Hawk's Pro Skater games offers a variety of engaging head-to-head options, with personal favorites being the classic high-score chase Trick Attack or showing off the highest point-inducing combos in H.O.R.S.E. Nintendo's *1080° Snowboarding* and *Wave Race 64* are arcade-style racers in chilling and tropical settings, respectively. While the multiplayer features only two-player races in both titles, that does not detract from the pleasing way both games handle navigating the dangerous slopes and treacherous waves against a friend.

Plenty of racing games are available, and some solid ones to start with are Acclaim's two Extreme-G games, which are suitable weapon-based futuristic racers. Midway's trio of Rush games multiplies the intensity of the Cruis'n trilogy with countless shortcuts and mammoth jumps to seek out. Another exhilarating Midway arcade racer is *Hydro Thunder*, but make sure you have the Expansion Pak installed to enable four-player support on the waterways.

Both Snowboard Kids games from Atlus feel like the equivalent of the Mario Kart gang exchanging their go-karts for snowboards in a downhill snow racer but beware, as both titles are uncommon. Even harder to find than the Snowboard Kids games is the highly collectible N64 version of *Worms Armageddon*. It is considered one of the best entries in the series that is all about teams of worms annihilating each other with weapons ranging from Banana Bombs to fan favorites like the Holy Hand Grenade.

Snowboard Kids perfectly captures the lighthearted yet competitive spirit of item-based party racers while breezing down the slopes! You cannot go wrong with either of the two N64 entries for your wintry multiplayer fix!

Nintendo and Rare added four-player split-screen support to most of their titles, and while some may not be top- or middle-tier worthy, they all deliver varying degrees of multiplayer fun to be had in *Donkey Kong 64*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, and *Star Fox 64*. While some heavyweight sluggers of first-person shooter multiplayer games are coming up, some worthy alternatives are still available when wanting to mix it up. Considering that, feel free to check out the later Turok games, *The World Is Not Enough*, and the two Quake ports that stand out the most from the competition. If you crave four-player puzzle games, Nintendo and Acclaim Entertainment have you covered with *Dr. Mario 64* and *Bust-A-Move '99*, respectively.

This period was more of a dark era for fighting games, supported by the fact that the N64 controller was not optimized for the standard fighting game. Some may be worth playing for quick laughs, like the outrageous *Clay Fighter 63⅓* and gory *Bio F.R.E.A.K.S.* For what

it is worth, both *Fighter's Destiny* and *Fighter Destiny 2* are unique curiosities with their points-based scoring, and *Killer Instinct Gold* is a solid sequel. If I were to recommend one legitimately, I would go with *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*, with it being the last hurrah for the original 2D era of Mortal Kombat and because it has an eight-player tournament mode to decide ultimate bragging rights.

Silver Tier

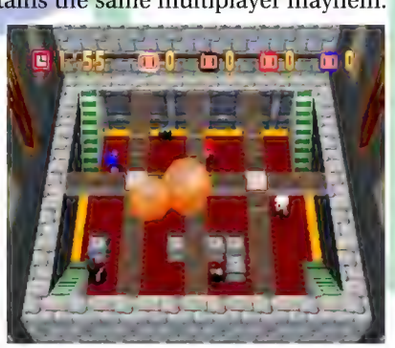
Suppose you want a break from the Mushroom Kingdom brand of kart racing. In that case, Rare has it under control with their pair of titles: *Diddy Kong Racing* changes the kart-based racing formula by offering up four-player action in hovercrafts and planes. In contrast, *Mickey's Speedway USA* has players revving their karts as Disney icons like Mickey & Minnie Mouse and Donald Duck. Nintendo was on fire with racing games this generation, and another one that delivers multiplayer action is *F-Zero X*. This second installment of the series features wild, twisting tracks with blazing speed that combine for thrilling races.

Both Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey games continue the pedigree of accessible and fun arcade sports experiences from Midway, and aside from the fast and fun hockey on hand here, these games also contain the best fights in hockey games since *Blades of Steel* on the NES. Konami's International Superstar Soccer titles are a few go-to soccer games. Nintendo provided more arcade sports fun with *Mario Golf* and *Mario Tennis*. Both games are littered with Mushroom Kingdom décor, outrageous power-ups, have a comprehensive roster of Mario-brand favorites (including the debut of Waluigi), and set the tone for future iterations on almost every succeeding Nintendo platform.

The high-speed thrills of *F-Zero X* receiving four-player split-screen support give a whole new meaning to "Boost Power!"

The 1997 version of *Bomberman 64* is a terrific 3D upgrade for a series that was always associated with great multiplayer. This installment successfully continues the trend of players bombing their way through a maze before blowing opponents into smithereens! The N64 version gives eliminated players a second chance by participating in ghost form from a stage's border in hopes of getting the last laugh. The 2001 version of *Bomberman 64*, exclusive to Japan, brings back the classic, sprite-based 2D graphics (and the adorable kangaroo-esque Louies) yet retains the same multiplayer mayhem.

Bomberman's addicting multiplayer proved to be an (explosive) hit when it made the leap into the world of polygons with *Bomberman 64*!



The New Tetris does a tremendous job upgrading the iconic puzzle experience with its multiplayer support for up to four players. It implements bonus scoring modifiers in the form of gold and silver blocks that add a new factor to clearing lines. Some may raise an eyebrow at me for including these next two games in my silver tier. Still, regardless of the console generation, I always pick up every system's version of the game show classics, *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy!* The adaptations of these television institutions are faithful representations of the shows and provide a perfect "palate cleanser" to decompress for a quick round of trivia or solving word puzzles with friends after spending many matches in a heated shooter or racing game.

Gold Tier

The gold tier is where the games reside that provided me with the best multiplayer moments and memories. *Mario Kart 64* immediately comes to mind because it retains the SNES feature of taking on a Grand Prix of four races against the computer with a friend or all-out four-player races and battles in some of the most fondly (and dastardly) remembered tracks from the franchise. Try racing Toad's Turnpike in reverse and have a side contest to see who drops the most expletives by the end of the race. The original *Super Smash Bros.* is a Nintendo multiplayer staple that debuted on the Nintendo 64. No one could have guessed the fervor that would result in future releases from this platform fighter and how it would be a colossal hit among casual and ardent fighting game fans alike.

Nintendo's original four-player platform fighter, *Super Smash Bros.*, resulted in many long sessions of players battling to see which of the 12 fighters reigned supreme in Nintendo lore.

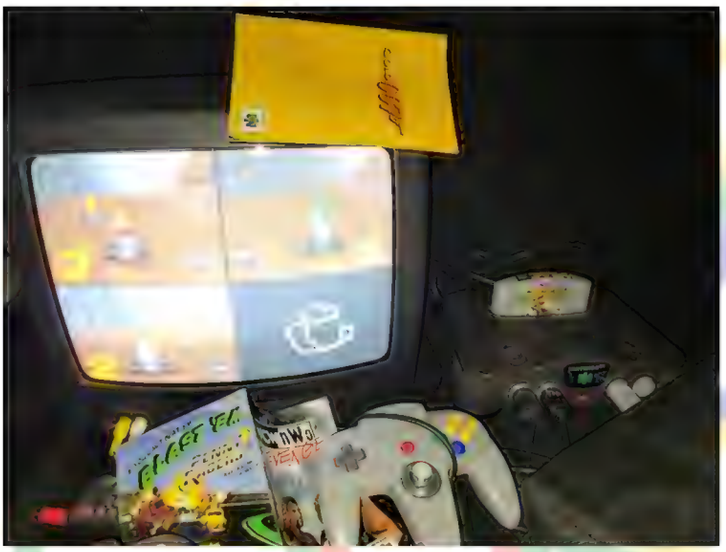
Rare's lethal pair of FPS standouts in *GoldenEye 007* and *Perfect Dark* supplies excellent multiplayer and an abundance of options. Every friend or family member I played these two shooters with had their favorite map and weapon presets. Whether it is going with Grenade Launchers in the Temple, Rocket Launchers in the Complex, or Laptop Guns in the Grid, there are many ways available to tear apart your loved ones with a plethora of weapons, modes, cheats, and customizations. Pro-tip: for frenetic fun, try playing *GoldenEye* with no armaments in Slappers Only and activating one-hit kills. *Perfect Dark* went the extra mile by adding co-op to play the entire campaign with a friend and the mischievous counter-op mode, where a friend controls a random enemy guard in a campaign level.

Midway's excellent arcade sports entries with the NFL Blitz series, *NBA Hangtime*, and *NBA Showtime: NBA on NBC* are all worthy of hanging with the above heavy hitters. All games have fast-paced gameplay that yields finished games within 10-15 minutes instead of an hour like their sim-based counterparts. They feature Midway's trademark over-the-top action and a simplified ruleset, making it irresistible for nearly anyone to pick up and play. I have had many people over for game nights who were not fans of sports games walk out of lengthy sessions without regretting a second.

The NFL Blitz series perfected arcade football with its over-the-top action, irresistible late-hits, and simplification of the NFL rule book! Later sequels, like *NFL Blitz 2001*, added four-player support to increase their popularity in multiplayer sessions!

Players also cannot go wrong with the trilogy of Mario Party titles for the ultimate multiplayer night. Do not be fooled by the cutesy and colorful game boards players maneuver across. Before you know it, you will exchange menacing glares and growls with your cohorts in

heated sessions to see who can win the most mini-games and rascal up the most stars by the last turn. Finally, the four AKI-developed wrestling games (six when including the two Japan-exclusive Virtual Pro Wrestling entries) are still regarded in many circles as the best-playing wrestling games of all time. In gems like *WCW/nWo Revenge* and *WWF No Mercy*, many priceless multiplayer moments can be created by teaming up to go after the tag team titles or participating in free-for-all Royal Rumbles.



Life by illumination! That warming CRT glow was a familiar sight during my many late-night N64 multiplayer sessions!

Powering Off

My favorite multiplayer memories from this era are of a high school-aged me, dressed to the nines in budget-valued wrestling shirts and Wrangler jeans with a 20 oz. bottle of Surge overstuffed into my back pocket, bringing my Nintendo 64-branded zip-up game pouch over to a friend's place and staying up all night mashing away on the one-of-a-kind controllers until we hard-crashed. That priceless feeling of this period would not have been possible without the enormous amount of multiplayer games available. On the N64, so many genres and game series finally broke out and had four-player support that had little to none before. I hope this rundown has helped clue you into some classics to fill up your own metaphorical N64 zip-up game pouch. Now, take that pouch to your friends and family to enlighten them on one of the best generations of local multiplayer games.

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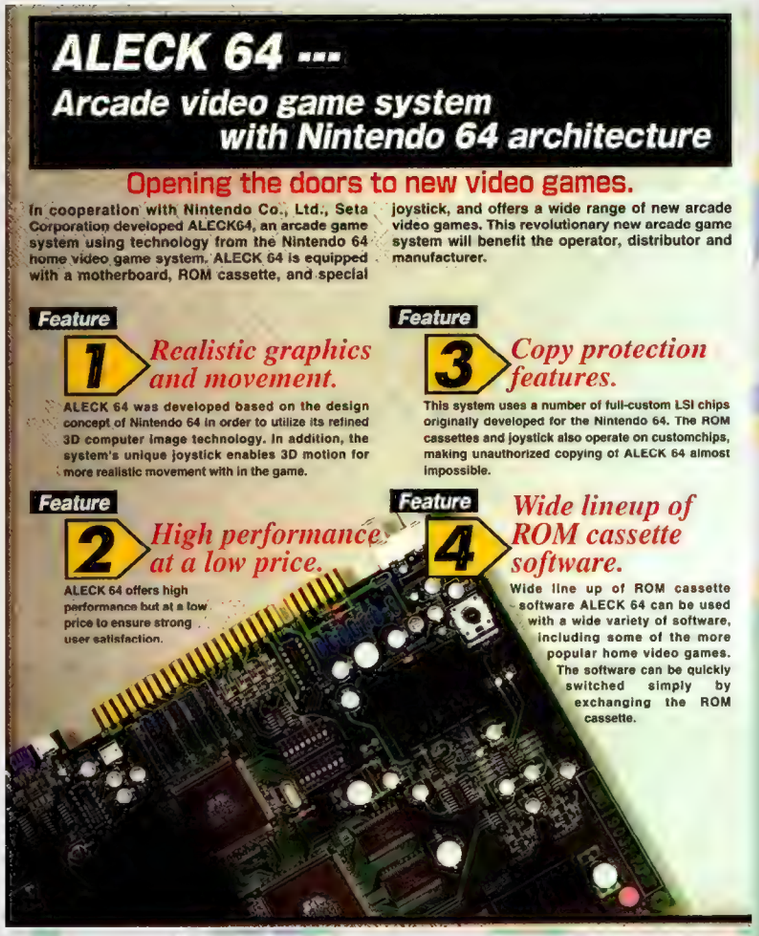
Dale Kulas has been covering video games since 1999 and currently is hunkering down in the Midwest, surviving its brutal winters by consuming too many video games while mixing in a variety of cardio and yoga workouts. He currently maintains a movie and video game blog at http://daleisgreat.blogspot.com.

Aleck64 Arcade Games

The Aleck64 is a JAMMA (Japan Amusement Machine and Marketing Association) arcade board developed by SETA in conjunction with Nintendo. It is based on the Nintendo 64 hardware and features interchangeable cartridges. This could allow arcade operators to purchase individual cartridges as part of kits to easily convert one Aleck64 arcade machine's game to another. SETA manufactured the Aleck64, and Visco distributed the arcade board from July 1998 until 2003.



Aleck Bordon Adventure 4th Story: Tower & Shaft

Genre: Platformer
Release Date: 2003
Developer: Altron
Publisher: Aruze
Players: 1
☆☆☆

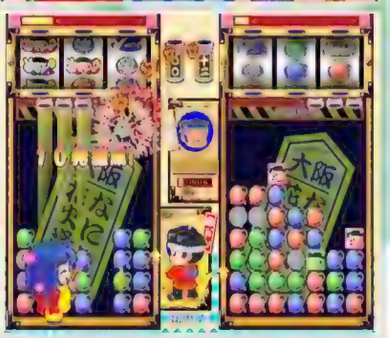
Aleck the explorer is featured in this dual title with cute 2D platforming action. Players select from one of two game modes, Tower or Shaft, and one of three stages, with 70, 70, and 100 "floors." Tower is a game of jumping ascension. Aleck walks continually left and right on platforms until reaching the stage's border and walking in the reverse direction. The player only controls jumping by holding and releasing the action button, which is tied to a power meter that determines the jump height. Springboards and moving platforms present the challenge; timing is key to ensuring Aleck can ascend and not fall lower. The game ends if he falls through the bottom before reaching the top floor. Pickups like a snail to slow Aleck's walk or a spring to increase Aleck's jump height can temporarily help. The gameplay is solid, if a bit cumbersome in execution. The Shaft game requires quick descension. Here, a controlled Aleck walks left and right while a spiked ceiling constantly lowers. Aleck has to descend from platform to platform without falling through the bottom of the screen or losing all of his health, which decreases when hitting the spiked ceiling or falling on a spiked platform. Pickups like umbrellas to fall slower, jewels to protect from spikes, and fruit and hearts to restore health are essential, but items to slow Aleck down should be avoided. Only two lives are available in this mode, but this twitchy experience of reflexes is a polished mini-game. Both Tower and Shaft also offer an endless time/score attack mode to rack up a high score by ascending/descending floors before eventual death. Although simple, this humorous arcade package should entertain for at least a quarter's worth of platforming fun. Note: A version of this title was released on the Game Boy Advance in 2004. – PC

Variant Cartridge

Don-chan Puzzle: Hanabi de Don!

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: 2003
Region: JP
Developer: Aruze
Publisher: Aruze
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
☆☆☆☆

In a fight for fireworks supremacy, players match falling blocks to defeat each of the five opponents. Above each person's half-screen tank is a slot machine, which creates the blocks. Players stop each of the wheels individually, with the symbols producing particular blocks: bombs, faces, a ball of paper, and a bonus. The bombs come in three colors (red, blue, and green) and are the primary block type. When a face with the corresponding bomb color comes into contact, it explodes that bomb and any others touching horizontally or vertically in a chain. Balls of paper explode with any adjacent bomb, and bonuses are added to a bar next to the character icon but do not produce a block. A full set of bonuses or filling the bar allows the player to take a break from the board and focus on spinning the slot machine a few times to try to get a particular set of symbols. Bonus round points, as well as bomb matches, are added to the opponent's fireworks tube at the top, which can drop extra bombs into their tank. Once a player has filled their tank to the top, their opponent wins. The cartoony graphics work well with all the bright colors and explosions. Each move has a generous time limit, allowing for precision and strategy with the slot machine if sacrificing speed. This unique experience may take a few rounds to understand the rules, but it is worth the effort. With various strategies to employ and the ability of a second player to jump in, the explosion of fun is guaranteed to be lit. Note: A port of this arcade title, *Don-Chan Puzzle - Hanabi de Don! Advance*, was released on the Game Boy Advance in 2004. – KY



Eleven Beat: World Tournament

Genre: Sports
Release Date: 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
☆☆☆☆

Teams of cute, 3D polygonal soccer players are at the center of this sports experience. There is an option for either one or two players. The solo mode is a bracket-style tournament where the player chooses to play a national team (including England, Argentina, and Nigeria). A loss in the competition results in a game over. The two-player mode is a friendly match between any of the national teams. During a match, the pitch is viewed at a downward angle. Red arrows appear over the heads of the players being controlled (blue arrows for the second player). Aside from shooting and passing, the characters can also shoulder tackle, slide tackle, head, and both ground and lob kick. A map at the bottom of the screen shows the pitch layout and each player's location. The map and viewpoint rotate based on the controlled character's location on the field. The bright, colorful graphics and smooth controls make fighting it out through each half a fun, action-filled time. The characters are entertaining with their simple emoticon faces and animated celebrations as they swing their arms after a goal. There are short bursts of upbeat entertainment whether a player is after a five-minute head-to-head against a friend or has their eyes set on the world championship. – KY

Hi★Pai Paradise

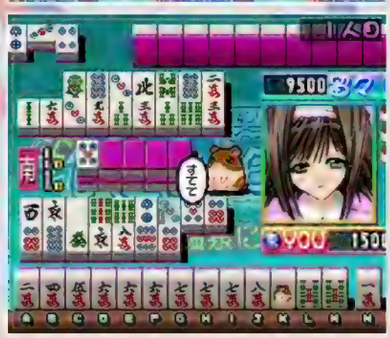
Genre: Tile Game
Release Date: 2003
Region: JP
Developer: Aruze
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
☆☆☆

Five opponents and one adorably rotund hamster await the player at the felt table in this flirtatious one-on-one mahjong game that describes itself as a "school romantic comedy." The goal remains the same as the four-player traditional game: attempt to build a scoring hand from fourteen tiles, exchanging one each turn, and carefully assembling a set while not providing your opponent that last tile they need to secure their scoring hand. The main menu offers two modes of play: Mode A is the Story mode, and challenges the player to defeat the ladies in order, with conversations before and after. Mode B takes the player to the training center, but other than some costume changes, the one-on-one gameplay remains largely the same. Players can select and discard tiles, declare riichi, use an opponent's discard for a set or run, or reveal a completed hand. The presentation is big and bold, with large tiles, short cutscenes for maneuvers like riichi calls, and various reactions from the opponent during play. Manga artist Yuna Kagesaki lends her talents to the stills and cutscenes throughout. The AI is moderately challenging but not insurmountable. Not much guidance is provided, though, so having a guide handy for legal riichi mahjong scoring hands is a big help for players still learning the complex and lengthy list of them. Note: This title is part of the Shin Super Real Mahjong Series, as the cartridge label notes. – DG

Hi★Pai Paradise 2: Onsen ni Ikouyo!

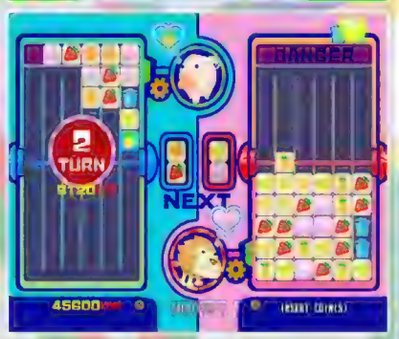
Genre: Tile Game
Release Date: 2004
Region: JP
Developer: Aruze
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
☆☆☆

This second Hi★Pai Paradise entry takes the fourteen-tile action from the schoolyard to the hot springs (the title translates to *Hi★Pai Paradise 2: Let's Go to the Hot Springs!*). Like in other mahjong games, the goal remains to create as powerful a set of 14 tiles as possible by drawing, discarding, and sometimes swiping foes' discarded tiles. While the same one-on-one gameplay returns, some new twists are added to Story mode, including the ability to choose from one of six opponents and the addition of in-game "mission" challenges, such as making certain types of hands or winning without stealing an opponent's tile. The presentation is bright and colorful, with large tiles and expressive antagonists drawn by Yuna Kagesaki. Despite the game's friendly appearance, there is little in the way of in-game assistance. Novice and intermediate players alike would be wise to bring a scoring guide with them to reference during play. The sequel adds one more thing, though: the rather adorable hamster tile, a welcome addition to any hand that would surely get you kicked out if you ever try to slip one into a real-life match! Note: This title is part of the Shin Super Real Mahjong Series, as the cartridge label notes. – DG



Kuru Kuru Fever

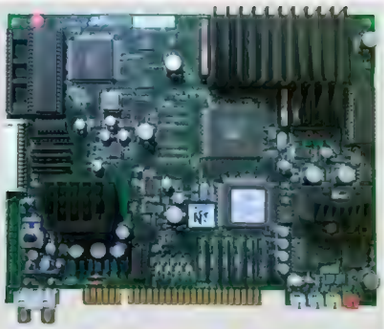
Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: 2003
Region: JP
Developer: Takumi
Publisher: Aruze
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
☆☆☆☆☆

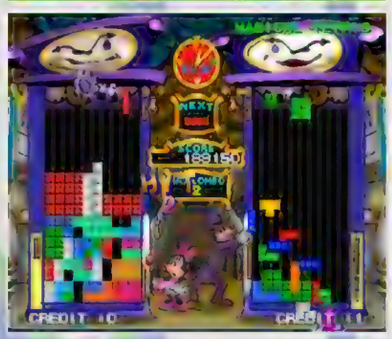


It's raining fruit for this pack of anthropomorphic animals battling each other in block-matching supremacy. There are two modes, including the non-interactive Challenge. For Story, the player selects one of eight animals, including a spotted cow, and faces each of the others (including two additional) through nine fast-paced levels. During play, characters work in an empty tank, arranging falling fruit block pairs to create links of four or more of the same block. These matches disappear, and any blocks above them fall. The animals have a unique favorite fruit. After creating a match with that favorite seed-bearing produce, the animal's tank flips, and the columns of blocks fall to the bottom. Then, the match requirement drops by one, so only three blocks are needed for a match. This process repeats with the board flipping and the requirement reducing until the tank has flipped four times, causing it to expel all blocks. This sequence stops if the match requirement is not met. Matching favorite fruit is how players can quickly send garbage blocks to their opponent, getting them closer to losing by filling their tank. This fast-paced puzzler's music and sound effects are pleasantly goofy, and this atmosphere fits the exaggerated cartoon style. Puzzle fans can find familiarity with the block-matching mechanic while being excited by the unique tank-flipping. Who doesn't want to step into a fantasy world where lions adore the peaches they place in an empty tank? – KY

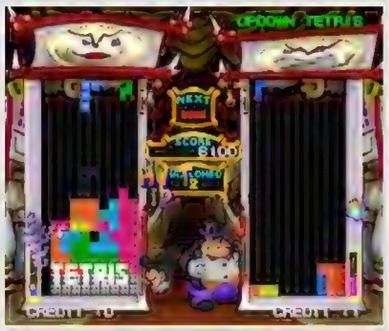
Magical Tetris Challenge Featuring Mickey

Genre: Puzzle
Release Date: 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
☆☆☆☆





Disney's Mickey and friends find a magical stone but must battle Big Bad Pete and his gang through bright, colorful block-stacking action to keep it safe. The solo player has six story mode levels, while two can play a single round of versus mode. During play, the screen is split into two tanks where tetrominoes fall from the top and can be rotated and shifted left and right. When the player creates a horizontal line of blocks, they disappear, and the lines above them drop down. In Magical Tetris, simultaneously getting rid of four lines (Tetris) or five lines (Pentris) sends difficult blocks to the opponent consisting of odd shapes or large chunks. Matches also charge a meter on the outside of the tank that, when filled, erases all blocks above its height. For Updown Tetris, the mechanics are more straightforward, with Tetrises causing blocks to appear at the bottom of the opponent's tank, pushing up all the existing ones. Achieve victory by getting the opponent's blocks to reach the top of their tank. Each of the four characters (Mickey, Minnie, Goofy, and Donald) has a slightly different version of the events surrounding the magical stone in story mode, with various backgrounds and outfits for each level. Players can choose among three degrees of difficulty that range from a casual experience to a sweaty, heart-pumping challenge. The adorable characters and upbeat music present a cartoony twist on a classic puzzler. Note: This title was available as an Aleck64 custom arcade board, not a cartridge. A version was released on the Nintendo 64 home console. – KY



Mayjinsen 3

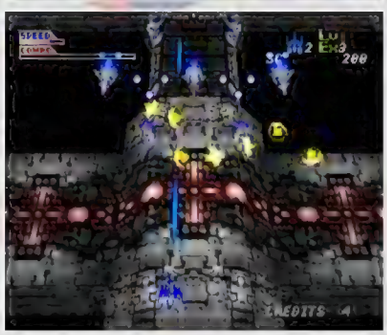
Genre: Board Game
Release Date: 2000
Region: JP
Developer: Random House, Kazuro Morita
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
☆☆☆

This shogi title brings the pressure of arcade gaming to the traditional tabletop game, as the player must face off against both their counterpart and the clock! Two sets of three opponents (Academy and Metropolis) for six characters total to face off with and two difficulties for each (Normal and Easy) let the player tailor their opponent and challenge level. After a quick bio on the opponent and a quick greeting, the top-down chess-like action begins. Taking turns, the player must maneuver their pieces strategically to capture forces and put the opponent's king into checkmate. A four-minute timer runs during the player's turn. Additional time is knocked off the clock if the player loses a round, and when it hits zero, the game is over. It takes quick wits and very good shogi skills to unseat opponents; the AI is built off the code designed by legendary shogi programmer and Random House founder Kazuro Morita, namesake of *Morita Shogi 64*. Even on the easier difficulty setting, the computer proves an unrelenting foe. Newer players to the game should find more forgiving shogi games to start on. – DG

Star Soldier: Vanishing Earth

Genre: Shooter
Release Date: 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Hudson Soft
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
☆☆☆

This vertical 2.5D polygonal shooter features the player commandeering one of three Special Interception Air spaceships to take on the Zeograd alien robot invasion in 2098. Each ship features different primary rapid-fire weapons and a limited amount of ExARMS special weapons in one of two forms, which can clear the screen of the enemy ships and robots. Attacking and evading waves of enemies simultaneously is smooth, and the action is fluid and requires constant attention to avoid being struck for a loss of life. While playing, each ship may have its speed adjusted. A roll ability provides defense by briefly shielding against enemy attacks and deflecting enemy fire. Collecting yellow orbs throughout the six stages will boost the primary weapon's ability and strength, while collecting green orbs will replenish a single ExARMS special attack. Boss battles against the giant ships and robot mechs are frenzied affairs, usually accounting for a few changes in forms before being defeated. As the stages progress, the amount of enemy aggression and incoming fire will require consistent use of the defensive roll and special attacks so players will not be overwhelmed. This challenging shooter is an enjoyable experience and includes a nice hit combo score counter to keep proceedings lively. Shooter fans should be amused at the action, even if the difficulty can be daunting and require quite a few quarters more to ensure the defense of Earth. Note: A version of this title was released on the Nintendo 64 home console. – PC



Super Real Mahjong VS

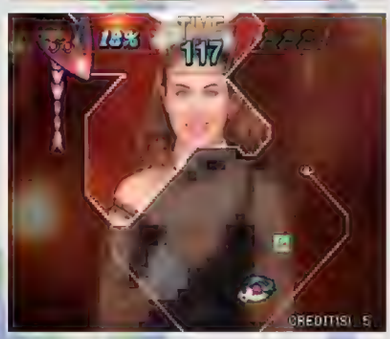
Genre: Tile Game
Release Date: 1999
Region: JP
Developer: SETA
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1
☆☆

A cast of nine ladies is up for some risque riichi in this Aleck64 entry of the long-running adult mahjong series. After selecting one of three starting opponents, the player begins the "story" and starts a mahjong gauntlet against nine opponents, each tougher than the last. Each victory earns the player a slideshow of their opponent stripping. Run out of points, and it's game over, though the player does get as many continues as they are willing to pay for. Fans of the series will recognize a number of the girls designed by Ryō Tanaka returning from previous Super Real Mahjong titles, particularly the three Sega Saturn entries, and the in-game art is solid overall. The five-second timer before drawing tiles and before choosing a tile to discard does get obnoxious pretty quickly, as it overpowers the otherwise pleasant game music. Still, the AI is less punishing than in some other mahjong games, so even less skillful tile-slingers should find something to enjoy here, although whether that is the gameplay or not is a matter of personal taste. – DG

ViviD Dolls

Genre: Action
Release Date: 1998
Region: JP
Developer: Visco
Publisher: SETA
Players: 1-2 (simultaneous)
☆☆

This adult-oriented action title (licensed by Nintendo, surprisingly) tasks players to reveal pictures of eight female models (cheerleader, nurse, teacher, etc.) while avoiding enemies on 2D sprite stages. Starting from a small rectangle, players control a cursor and can move freely along its borders and attempt to form an enclosed loop shape by drawing out from the original shape. Creating a larger shape will reveal more of the pixelated picture (and trigger an annoying moaning sound). Exposing at least 70% of the picture or trapping the main enemy by surrounding it will reveal the entire picture and complete the stage. Each model has three timed stages, with the first stage's image being more subdued but the second and third being more risqué poses and usually featuring topless nudity. However, strange scorpion-like and spinning enemies stand in the way of titillation. If an enemy or projectile touches the player's cursor while trying to extend the shape or the line being drawn, one of the three lives will be lost. This danger is compounded by projectiles and often cramped spaces on the screen. The cursor can envelop enemies to eliminate them, and power-ups (increasing time, freezing enemies, super speed, shield) can be attained similarly. Trapping the main stage enemy (which may be difficult) sometimes awards a key. Attaining three keys will launch a bonus 10-second button-mashing stage to reveal a new nude picture of the current model by removing fruit slices covering it. The shallow experience in theme and function could elicit cheap thrills, provided that players' desire matches the quarters on hand. – PC



Collector's Corner

This section highlights some N64 titles that were released with additional products/accessories or had a variant release that did. For a more exhaustive list, please visit the website Collector.UltimateN64.com.

64 Ōzumō

A variant of this Japanese sumo wrestling game included a Controller Pak. A gold sticker on the front of the box indicated this.

Army Men: Sarge's Heroes

A North American variant of *Army Men: Sarge's Heroes* included a keychain of Sgt. Hawk, as noted by a sticker on the shrink wrap.

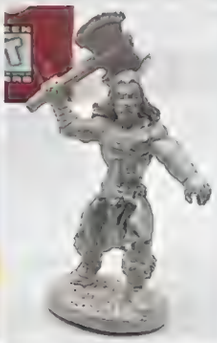
Choro Q 64

The Japanese release of *Penny Racers* had a big box variant that included a model car kit.

Dōbutsu no Mori

Dōbutsu no Mori [Animal Forest] had a version that included a Controller Pak with two game-themed labels to adhere to it.

Gauntlet Legends



This window box variant was available at Wal-Mart and included a metal figurine of the ax-wielding Warrior.

The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask Adventure Set

Released in Europe with only 1,000 individually numbered units produced, this "Limited Edition Adventure Set" included a watch, a two-CD soundtrack, a sticker, two pins, a poster, and a certificate of authenticity.

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Special Edition

Cyber Games in Germany offered this "Special Edition." The bundle included a black or white T-shirt, metal shield and sword pin, and a brochure featuring other Legend of Zelda merchandise to order.

Micro Machines Turbo 64

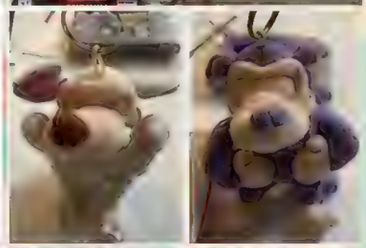
In North America, the first retail release of this racing title was in a window box that included a Micro Machines toy vehicle.

NFL Blitz 2000

This variant included a BradyGames mini strategy guide folded and secured on the back of the box.

Rampage 2: Universal Tour

Various items were initially offered in North America for the purchase of *Rampage 2*. Wal-Mart sold a big box version that included a "Rampage Baby" plush keychain of George, Curtis, or Ralph. K-Mart offered a six-inch plush of Ruby, Lizzie, or Boris with purchase. Meanwhile, Electronics Boutique and Best Buy included a T-shirt gift for those who pre-ordered. However, this T-shirt was shrink-wrapped with the game box at Sears, Target, and Toys "R" Us. Babbage's customers received a notepad (not pictured).



Rayman 2: The Great Escape

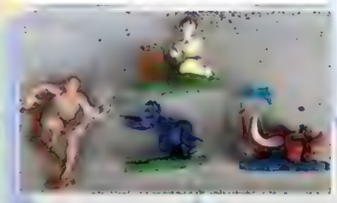
A North American variant of *Rayman 2* included a temporary tattoo set consisting of Rayman and other game characters, advertised by a sticker on the box. Another variant advertised a free set of stickers (not pictured). Also of note is that *Rayman 2* was released in both a standard box and a foil-embossed one.

Shadow Man

Shadow Man sunglasses (with case) were included in a North American variant for customers who pre-ordered through Electronics Boutique. The case was shrink-wrapped to the back of the box, indicated by a sticker on the shrinkwrap. The inside of the case is marked "Acclaim," Shadow Man's publisher.

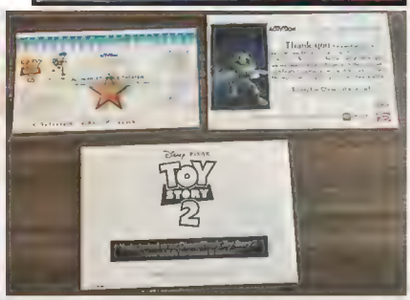
(Disney's) Tarzan

A big box version of *Tarzan* in North America included two character figurines from the game/animated film. Four total were offered: Tarzan, Jane, Terk, and Tantor.



(Disney•Pixar) Toy Story 2: Buzz Lightyear to the Rescue

The first North American release of *Toy Story 2* advertised an invitation to see the new animated film on the box. Inside was an envelope containing a certificate redeemable for one child's admission to see the movie, up to a $4.50 value.



World Driver Championship

A large T-shirt was shrink-wrapped to the back of the box of this NA variant, as indicated on the box.

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Bryan Sutermaster
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Bryce Grammer
Bryce McDougall
Bubs
Buttery Salt
Cadavercide
Cale Nelson
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